

Soon to be a TV series . . .

\$1.75 USA

SCIENCE FICTION

AMAZING

STORIES

Combined with FANTASTIC[®] Stories
K • 47734 • UK: £1.25 • MAR 1985

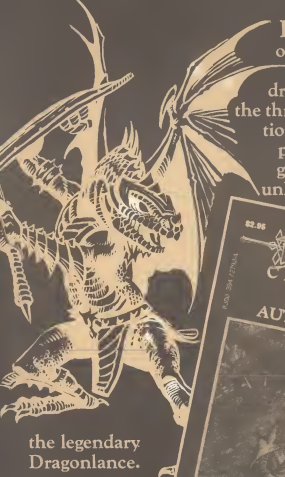
Michael Swanwick
Ian Watson



Tom Disch
Robert Silverberg
F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

edited by George Scithers,
four-time Hugo award winner





DRAGONS: Creatures of legends, stories told to children. But when dragons return to Krynn, the threat of war and destruction engulfs the land. The promise of hope forces a group of friends into the unlikely roles of heroes, as they search for —

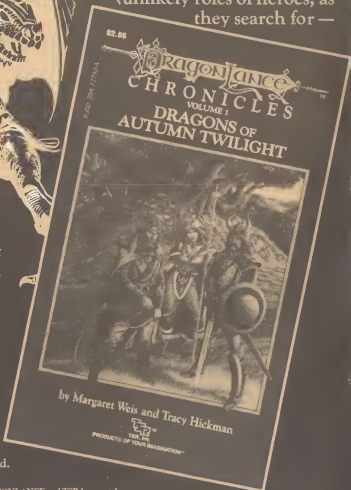
the legendary
Dragonlance.



TSR, Inc.

448 pages • \$2.95
NOVEMBER 1984

Distributed to the book trade in the U.S. by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada, Ltd.



DRAGONLANCE, the DRAGONLANCE and TSR logos, and PRODUCTS OF YOUR IMAGINATION are trademarks owned by TSR, Inc. © 1984 TSR, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Volume 58
Number 6
(Whole Number 521)
March 1985

Amazing® Science Fiction Stories combined with **FANTASTIC® Stories**, ISSN 0279-1706, is published bimonthly by Dragon Publishing, a division of TSR, Inc., (201 Sheridan Springs Road) P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Single copy price: \$1.75, plus 50 cents postage and handling. Subscription rates: \$9.00 for 6 issues (one year) or \$16.00 for 12 issues (two years) sent to U.S. addresses; for Canada, subscription rates are \$11.00 for 6 issues or \$20.00 for 12 issues; for all other countries, subscription rates are \$15.00 for surface mail or \$30.00 for air mail of 6 issues. Subscriptions must be paid in advance in U.S. funds. All subscription requests should be sent to Dragon Publishing, P.O. Box 72089, Chicago IL 60690.

This magazine welcomes unsolicited submissions of written material or artwork. All such submissions must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope of size sufficient to return unused submissions to the contributor. The publisher does not assume responsibility for submissions in any event.

AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories and **FANTASTIC® Stories** are trademarks owned by TSR, Inc. **AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories** copyright© 1984 by TSR, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. Second class postage paid at Lake Geneva WI and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Dragon Publishing, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147

AMAZING®

MARCH 1985

Founded in 1926
by Hugo Gernsback

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Robert Silverberg: Opinion
- 9 Frank Catalano, Robert Coulson, Patrick L. Price & Roger Raupp: Book Reviews
- 23 The Readers: Discussions
- 107 Baird Searles: Screen Reviews
- 162 George H. Scithers: The Observatory

FICTION

- 32 Eluki bes Shahar: Hellflower
- 60 Lillian Stewart Carl: Upon This Shoal of Time
- 73 F. Gwynplaine Macintyre: Improbable Bestiary — The Faun & The Ogre
- 76 James Turpin: The Perfect Day
- 92 Ian Watson: On the Dream Channel Panel
- 111 Wil Creveling: Plot Template
- 112 Michael Swanwick: The Blind Minotaur
- 127 Tom Disch: The Mittens of Ulysses
- 128 Grania Davis: What Happened on Cranberry Road

FACT

- 53 Stephen L. Gillett, Ph.D.: The Scientific Literature

COVER: Larry Elmore for "Hellflower"

Opinion

by Robert Silverberg

I spoke last time of the current paradoxical environmental problems growing out of the United States' abhorrence of nuclear power — the growing incidence of deadly acid rain that is largely caused by coal-burning power plants. Since political considerations make it impossible to build additional nuclear power plants in this country, and additional electrical capacity of some sort will be required in the next decade, power companies are turning by default to coal, the outmoded fuel of the 1920s and 1930s — with unavoidably horrendous results.

Not only is the acid fallout from coal-burning plants trashing forests and lakes all across the land right at this moment, but the burning of fossil fuels to generate electricity is liberating carbon dioxide that is heating up our atmosphere through the "greenhouse effect." At the rate the CO₂ buildup is proceeding, global temperatures may increase as much as 9 degrees Fahrenheit by the year 2100 — turning northern lands into torrid tropical jungles, flooding coastal regions, disrupting patterns of food production, and probably creating vast upheavals in every aspect of human life. That process is already under way. Meanwhile, terrified of *potential* dangers from nuclear power plants, the citizens of the United States have turned their backs on what seems to be our only hope for a cheap and reasonably safe power supply over the next two or three decades.

The rest of the world doesn't share our horror of nuclear energy. The Japanese, who have more reason than anyone to dread the forces locked up in the atom, are building nuclear power plants at a swift clip. So are the French, the Russians, the British. The Chinese have asked us to help them master nuclear-power technology. (They already have the bomb; now they want the power plants.) At home we fret about radiation discharges, the chances of catastrophic meltdowns, the problems of waste disposal, and all manner of other stark contingencies, while bringing a complete halt to new construction of nuclear power plants and forcing to the edge of bankruptcy those companies who find themselves in the middle of building one. Are all these nations blindly plunging ahead with insane programs, while we alone maintain our sanity? Or has some sort of quasi-medieval panic fear spread among us like an epidemic of unreasoning foolishness?

Certainly we look odd to our neighbors. Up in Canada, where thirteen commercial reactors are in use and nine more are under construction, nuclear power is an uncontroversial issue. The Canadians, who use a heavy-water reactor of their own design that is apparently the most efficient in the world, are preparing to take advantage of our chaos by selling some of their surplus nuclear-generated energy to us. Already, a nuclear plant in the province of New Brunswick ships a third of its power to

A BRAND-NEW
NOVEL BY THE
BESTSELLING
AUTHOR OF
DRAGON'S EGG



Robert L. Forward

THE FLIGHT OF THE DRAGONFLY

"His SF-scientific imagination is unsurpassed...this is a must!"

— PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

"Outshines *Dragon's Egg*...rates a solid ten on my mind-boggle scale. If there were a Hugo for the most enjoyable alien creation, the flouwen would be frontrunners."

— LOCUS

"I much enjoyed *The Flight of the Dragonfly*. Part of my enjoyment came from knowing that the man damned well knows what he's talking about...."

— LARRY NIVEN

FEBRUARY

BAEN BOOKS

55937-0 384 pp. • \$3.50

The future is NOW!

Distributed by Simon & Schuster Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas • New York, N.Y. 10020

the New England states. Since New England is a center of anti-nuclear phobia here but desperately needs new sources of energy, the obliging Canadians are getting ready to build another nuclear plant to supply us. Under a long-term contract, we will spend billions to buy electricity from Canada through the 1990s — paying for the plant several times over in power purchases alone, a nice deal for Canada and a very dumb one for us.

Our turning away from nuclear power is, so it seems to me, part of a general abdication from technological leadership that is likely to have ghastly consequences for the United States in the century to come. Except in the area of computer technology — where, for the moment, we are leading the way — we have become a nation of mere consumers, blandly importing the superior products of other nations. The Japanese make our television sets and tape recorders, and most of our cars (except for the deluxe ones, which come from Germany). Our cameras, our phonograph records, our precision instruments, all come mainly from overseas. Americans invented the television set, the automobile, the phonograph. Other people have improved on our pioneering designs. We invented the nuclear power plant, too. (And the atomic bomb, for that matter.) If a time ever comes when we overcome our fear of nuclear reactors and try to re-establish a nuclear industry here, we will probably have to hire Japanese or French technicians to build the plants for us. "We've certainly fallen behind in the front end," says Harvey Brooks of Harvard, chairman of the Committee on Nuclear and Alternative Energy Sources. "New design, [and] thinking about the future has practically disappeared." From George Keyworth II, President

Reagan's science advisor, comes this warning: "We're going to find our nation's capacity for industrial growth choked — and choked at a time when our foreign competitors, who don't face the kinds of hurdles in developing nuclear energy that we do, will be more than happy to pick up the slack." Dr. Alvin Weinberg of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee puts it more succinctly: "Giving up on nuclear energy is insane."

Insane? What about the China Syndrome? What about the radiation leaks? What about waste disposal? What about the theft of fissionable nuclear materials by terrorists?

Real problems, sure — but some have been preposterously exaggerated by those whose profession it is to terrify the public. (Nuclear power plants have been around for a generation. How much plutonium have terrorists stolen so far, and when will they announce their demands?) The rest surely have real solutions. Such accidents as have taken place in nuclear power plants have been caused by incompetent personnel or by faulty safety-mechanism design, not by anything inherent in the concept of nuclear power generation. Those errors are correctible and by now have been corrected; overseas, where standardized reactor design is the rule, they have not been a problem. Meanwhile the need for electricity continues to rise: 35% of the energy used in this country today is in the form of electricity, up from 18% in 1968. The various utopian schemes for "soft" energy production — solar power and the like — still offer no large-scale solutions. Coal is the only alternative source we have at the moment; and the problems it creates are real and current, not merely potential. Disposing of spent nuclear fuel may be a prob-

**NOTHING ON THIS EARTH
COULD STAND AGAINST IT**

DAVID DRAKE ☆ KARL EDWARD WAGNER



Lycon was the greatest of the beast hunters
who fed the bloody maw of Rome's Coliseum.
How was he to know that the creature
he sought this time was not only as cunning
as he...but came from a world
more vicious than he could imagine?

DECEMBER
ISBN: 55931-1
288 pp. • \$2.95



Distributed by Simon & Schuster
Mass Merchandise Sales Company
1230 Avenue of the Americas • New York, N.Y. 10020

lem, but so is acid rain. So is the greenhouse effect. So is the economic burden of burning fossil fuels. (And the cost in lives. Mining coal requires the real deaths of real people: cave-ins, black lung disease, emphysema. How many deaths have nuclear power plants caused?)

A new proposal — the thorium reactor — holds promise for getting around the hysteria and ignorance blocking nuclear power generation in the United States. Thorium is much more plentiful than uranium; when used in a reactor it would create only a fiftieth as much plutonium as a standard reactor, and that plutonium would be an isotope unsuitable for nuclear detonation. Thus thorium reactors could be built in politically unstable third-world countries without

fear of what they might do with dangerous fissionable byproducts. Melt-down possibilities also would be greatly reduced. Thorium reactors would be simple to build and safe and cheap to operate; and the cost of converting present-day reactors to thorium would be relatively small.

The developer of the thorium reactor is Dr. Alvin Radkowsky, who was chief scientist of the U.S. Naval Propulsion Program from 1948 to 1972. He thinks it would take less than a decade to bring his concept into use, with a very modest development cost. Unfortunately, no one in the United States seems to be thinking much about thorium reactors these days. Dr. Radkowsky is currently professor of nuclear engineering at Tel Aviv University.

3<

Publisher:
Mike Cook

Editor:
George Scithers

Assistant Editor:
Patrick L. Price

Graphic Designer:
Kristine L. Bartyzel

**Advertising
Sales
Administrator:**
Andrea Lee Hein

Production:
Betty Elmore,
Charles Ramsay,
Roger Raupp



BOOK REVIEWS

by Frank Catalano

Book Reviewing As Psychoanalysis:

Once in a while I'll pick up a book and read it for review, or simply for pleasure (the two do mix now and then). And something in it will grab me. Grab me so hard that when I'm through reading the book, parts of it stay with me.

I don't mean simple memory of the plot. It's a sticking to the psyche of some basic element: a character, the book's world-view, even a setting. Whatever it is, it's done so well, in such a striking manner, that I can't get it out of my head.

And consciously or subconsciously, I make that change in myself.

I'd like to think at this point that more of you are nodding your heads in agreement than getting on the phone and making a psychiatric referral. A lot of us find something special in certain books that not only has us saying, "neat!" under our breaths, but also affects us at a basic level. We take that something off the rack, and try it on throughout the book. We may even see if we like the color or style for a few hours afterwards, or days. If it truly fits us, we wear it for life.

Maybe it's because something in that piece of writing resonates with something we know to be true about ourselves; maybe it's something we're becoming and embrace as an example. Maybe it's simply something different that might be worth a daydream or two. My own reading for this column has left me with nearly-tangible memories of the steamboat captain in George

R.R. Martin's *Fevre Dream*, the pseudo-baroque space station in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the well-defined post-holocaust America in Dean Ing's *Single Combat*, and the matter-of-fact, horrifying opening to John Varley's *Millennium*.

What these revelations say about me as a person I'm not prepared to guess (maybe some of you are running to the phone even now). It's likely that what affects me doesn't affect you the same way.

Whatever the reason for the effect, the cause is good writing. The book as a whole may not be great. But that rare individual element can make a mediocre work memorable; a bright work brilliant. It's a quality I've called "haunting" in these pages.

When a writer imagines such a ghost, it can be made real.

Palimpsests

by Carter Scholz and Glenn Harcourt
Ace, \$2.95 (paper)

Palimpsests is one of those books, in part. It's not a novel I can give an overwhelming endorsement to, because at times it teeters on the brink of self-indulgent cleverness and does fall into the dark pit of overwriting on several occasions. But the introspective mood that it encourages is contagious.

First off, *Palimpsests* is one of the new Ace Science Fiction Specials edited by Terry Carr. I gave good reviews to the second and third specials (*Green Eyes* and *Neuromancer* in the November '84 issue), so perhaps

my opinion is colored in that I'm continuing to expect great things out of this series. But one of my major tenets of reviewing is to judge a work based on whether the author was able to do what the author set out to do. And authors Scholz and Harcourt seem to accomplish that goal nicely by having you question (a) the nature of reality, (b) the nature of history, and (c) the nature of time.

The story is that of a young anthropologist who, while on a dig in West Germany, comes across a paradox: a two-centimeter cube of metal in a site at least 80,000 years old. He, his on-again off-again anthropologist girlfriend, and their publicity-hungry mentor head off in different directions to find out what it means. Thus, the promise of the title is fulfilled — "pallimpsests" are defined as parchments from which the writing has been partly or completely removed to make way for another text, as history may be similarly affected in this novel.

Though the young anthropologist does a bit much in the way of self-analysis and handles a lot of the exciting situations in a far too detached manner, there are enough off-beat characters and settings to make parts of this book a treat.

The Infinity Link

by Jeffrey A. Carver

Bluejay Books, \$16.95 (cloth)

Publicity blurbs describe *The Infinity Link* as an SF novel Arthur Hailey might have written. After reading it, I have to agree — in a positive sense.

The Infinity Link is a big novel. Not just big in scope — it's that, too — but long: almost 550 pages. The time is the near future. An alien spacecraft is approaching the Earth, but only a multi-government sanctioned project knows that for sure, and they're not

telling anyone. The project is working to make contact with the spacecraft using tachyon transmissions.

Psychological-test subject Mozelle Moi is the key to the success of the transmission, but she doesn't know that. All that Moi knows is she's spent a lot of time going through computer simulations that seem like reality with another personality, one she's only met through the computer hook-up. And she's determined to follow him no matter where it takes her.

The book struck me as a little cotton-candyish, and I think it's because I'm used to the ideas or outstanding characters getting center stage in an SF novel. In this case, it's the situation that gets center stage, a situation that involves a number of characters, a potentially world-threatening first contact, and political machinations. There's nothing here to sink your teeth into.

Not that it matters if all you're looking for is good entertainment with a wide cast taking part. *The Infinity Link* offers that. Carver also goes a couple of steps further than a lot of writers would with the story. I fully expected the novel to end at a point about two-thirds into it, and *again* to end a chapter or so before the final page (leaving the reader to draw his/her own Significant Conclusion). It didn't, and it's to Carver's credit he took the situation and ran with it until it stopped logically.

Carver has written a novel that will do well with mainstream readers. *The Infinity Link* may not make you think, but it's a pleasant read.

The 40-Minute War

by Janet and Chris Morris

Baen Books, \$13.95 (cloth)

The 40-Minute War is a novel that also appears to be aimed at the main-

The most astonishing fantasy debut of the decade.

Raymond Feist's massive tale of heroic adventure and powerful magic is available in paperback at last! Spanning two universes and introducing the richly imagined kingdom of Midkemia, *Magician* was hailed as "the best new fantasy concept in years" (*Dragon Magazine*)... "a most exciting addition to the fantasy field" (*André Norton*)... "a novel so compelling it may be one of the finest epic fantasies of our time" (*Charlotte Observer*)...

"epic in scope—totally gripping" (*Washington Post*).

"With its mythical creatures, its vast array of arresting characters, and its threat of destruction to Midkemia, Feist's tale invites comparison to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" (*Best Sellers*).

Look for *Silverthorn*, the second volume of Raymond Feist's "Riftwar Trilogy," to be published in early 1985 by Doubleday.



MAGICIAN

A NOVEL BY

RAYMOND E. FEIST

NOW AN \$8.95 OVERSIZE PAPERBACK

DOUBLEDAY

stream crowd, but it's nowhere near as successful in character development and SF concepts as *The Infinity Link*.

The 40-Minute War is about a nuclear exchange that comes about when the recommendations of a CIA covert action team based in Israel are ignored, and about the subsequent attempts of the State Department intelligence agent who ignored the report to try to salvage what's left. It starts off with promise: a Saudi Arabian jetliner is commandeered by Arab extremists, who crash it into the White House, triggering a terrorist-built nuclear bomb. There are also nice touches about an experimental cancer vaccine, and hints of a secret, failed CIA project that could turn the war into something else entirely.

Aside from these touches and the opening, the novel is nothing more than a secret-agent chase story. It's tough to keep track of which characters are on whose side, and even who's speaking at times. And the ending — I cannot by the Canon of Reviewing reveal it, but my God, what a hackneyed cop-out.

The authors are said to have inside information on how the intelligence community operates. *The 40-Minute War* proves that no matter how much dry information you have, you need a lot more, or you wind up with a dry novel.

Emergence

by David R. Palmer
Bantam, \$2.95 (paper)

Those who enjoyed David R. Palmer's stories "Emergence" and "Seeking" in *Analog* in 1981 and 1983 will undoubtedly be looking for this book. They won't be disappointed. The first third of *Emergence* incorporates those two pieces seamlessly, and makes for a fine first novel.

Homo sapiens is dying out. A deadly bug triggered by radiation in upper-atmosphere nuclear blasts has killed off most of humanity. But not all. There are human survivors, classified secretly before the war as *homo post hominem*. Identified as being geniuses and never getting ill, most of them never knew they were any different from their neighbors, or of the changes in their genetic make-up that appeared to begin in the great flu pandemic of 1918-19.

The story is told from the point of view of Candy Smith-Foster, an 11-year-old *homo post hominem* girl, as she tries to figure out what happened, where to find other survivors, and how to rebuild society. The telling is personal, full of detail, but done in such a way that it doesn't feel like someone has just dropped an expository lump. It also plays well on a hope many of us had when we were young SF readers: that we weren't strange, we were just special, and wait 'til They find out.

Emergence is entertaining, thoughtful, warm, and humorous with solid scientific speculation. I challenge anyone not to identify in large measure with Candy Smith-Foster, no matter what their sex or age. It's a book that won't let go of you.

Universe 14

edited by Terry Carr
Doubleday, \$11.95 (cloth)

At a science-fiction convention in the middle of last year, Terry Carr warned me that *Universe 14* was going to be "a little weird." He was right. It's also generally good, as most of the *Universe* anthologies have been. Sometimes entertainment and easy comprehension of what's going on in a story are sacrificed for deep thought, but the *Universe* anthologies are worthwhile, overall.

She left where the light was young to fulfill her desires below. Now trapped and hypnotized within the circus she could only dream of home.

*Now come with us
on her return!*

A realistic fantasy for the thinker and the child that is within us. Using masterful language the author has created a beautiful adventure that startles and touches us. It makes us laugh and it makes us wonder.

"A charming allegoric tale ...
Enjoyed on many levels."

FORESIGHT
England

"Tour the circus of life through the eyes of an innocent. All the colors are there, along with the good and the evil."

RAINBOW ELECTRONIC
REVIEWS

"One of the most spellbinding pieces of linguistic legerdemain I have encountered in a long while.

A book for all seasons, to be read and reread."

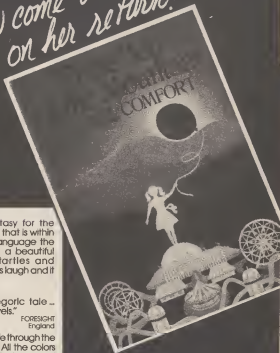
WEST COAST REVIEW
OF BOOKS

BRIDGES TO THE SOUND
PUBLISHING CORPORATION

P.O. Box 260607, Tampa, Florida 33686

ISBN 0-938-316-02-8 Clothbound 236p. \$12.95

Charter member of the Florida Publishers Group.



Universe 14 features 10 original stories. Among the better ones: Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Lucky Strike," a look at what might have happened had a different crew dropped the first atomic bomb; "Art in the War Zone" by Pat Murphy, in which an artists' colony that's taken over San Francisco fights an army from Sacramento its own way; "The Menagerie of Babel," Carter Scholz's introspective (remember the previously reviewed *Palimpsests*) account of a young man drawn into another's torment about the variety of life; and Lucius Shepard's "Black Coral," set on a Caribbean island, an island that's more than it seems when judgement needs to be handed down.

I gave *Universe 13* a Satisfaction Index rating (number of memorable pages divided by total number of pages) of 79. *Universe 14* rates an 80. Weird, yes, but quality weirdness.

A Pliocene Companion

by Julian May
Houghton Mifflin, \$13.95 (cloth)

Confused by some of the terms in *THE SAGA OF PLIOCENE EXILE*? Want to know exactly which events follow each other? Or want to know why opera was important to the creation of the *SAGA*?

Then *A Pliocene Companion* is for you. Billed as a reader's guide to the four books that make up the *SAGA*, *A Pliocene Companion* includes a

lengthy glossary, maps, interviews with Julian May, even a bibliography of books used to research the series.

Not one to usually buy non-fiction additions to a fiction series, I nevertheless found *A Pliocene Companion* to be an interesting account of the story behind the stories, and a good reference work. No *SAGA OF PLIOCENE EXILE* completist should be without it.

Endorphins: New Waves in Brain Chemistry

by Joel Davis
Dial Press, \$16.95 (cloth)

Normally I don't deal with books that aren't at least related to SF. But *Endorphins: New Waves in Brain Chemistry* is a science book that's both a good reference work for the SF writer and interesting reading for anyone who wants to know more about how our brains work. Author Joel Davis, who's done a number of science articles for *Omni*, *Science Digest*, and others, writes clearly about a complicated field of research: brain chemistry. Endorphins are the body's natural painkillers, and Davis begins with basic biochemistry (for those of us who've forgotten what we learned in high school), then moves on to how endorphins may be connected to pain, drug abuse, mental illness, stress, and more. It's the type of stuff that good science fiction is made of.

by Robert Coulson

The Flight of the Dragonfly

by Robert L. Forward
Timescape, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

This one is very hard science; the

primary emphasis is on the physics of the planet Rocheworld, with secondary emphasis on the biology of its inhabitants. It's a fascinating book, though, because the physics and biology are so

A NOVEL BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

ENDER'S GAME

"ENDER'S GAME
will still be finding
new readers when ninety-nine
percent of the books published this year are completely forgotten."

—GENE WOLFE

"In this novel that tells the full and compelling
story of Ender, Card fulfills his early promise...and more."

—BEN BOVA



A TOR
HARDCOVER
WE'RE
PART OF
THE FUTURE

Distributed
by St. Martin's
Press

ON SALE
IN
DECEMBER

352 PAGES
\$13.95

bizarre. The human characters are pure cardboard, but since their only purpose is to give the aliens something new to react to, they're adequate for their rôle. It's entirely a book about a strange alien world, and it's quite interesting. Sort of like a Hal Clement book with less human interest and more science.

The Years of the City

by Frederik Pohl

Timescape, \$15.95 (hardcover)

An interesting title, as it was when George R. Stewart used it for a somewhat better book several decades ago. Oh well; people who discuss books complain about duplicated titles, but the average reader probably never notices them. This isn't a novel, but a collection of connected novelets about a future New York City. They've been running as a series in *F&SF*, though you wouldn't know it from the copyright notice; the stories in the final third of the book, though, seem to be original. Together, the stories provide a good speculative look at the evolution of New York (and by implication, of other cities) in the next half-century or so. I sometimes wonder why anyone would want to look at a future New York, but I realize that this is due to my rural bias, and the viewpoint isn't shared by most readers. The scientific speculations are believable, the characters — some of them appearing in more than one of the stories — are well-drawn, and the social/political background is right out of our daily news stories. Well done and enjoyable, though perhaps not terribly memorable. Certainly worth your time to read.

Phoenix in the Ashes

by Joan D. Vinge

Bluejay, \$14.95 (hardcover)

A collection of the author's shorter

works; the title story, "Voices From the Dust," "The Storm King," "The Peddler's Apprentice," "Psiren," and "Mother and Child," plus commentary on each one by the author. Most of the stories involve the power of love in one or another aspect; otherwise they're as wide a variety of plots and backgrounds as you're likely to get from one author. All of them are excellent. I disliked "The Storm King," but that probably testifies to the author's ability; she said that she was trying for something with the feel of a classic fairy tale, and since I also dislike classic fairy tales, I assume she was successful. Highly recommended; even if you read the stories in their earlier appearances, it's nice to have them all in one volume.

The Land Beyond the Gate

by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach

Del Rey, \$2.75 (paperback)

I get tired of everyone doing Celtic mythology, but this one is fun. A modern man goes through a magic portal to discover Taliesin and the rest of the Irish demigods, alive and well in Tir-nan-og. Eshbach's last previous fiction appeared in 1957, so there is an aura of pulp adventure in this — it's all to the good, as far as I'm concerned. Our hero's adventures are extremely improbable, but they're entertaining. No award-winner, but a reasonably enjoyable adventure.

Rhialto the Marvelous

by Jack Vance

Baen Books, \$12.95 (hardcover), distributed by Simon & Schuster

Vance's *The Dying Earth* is one of the great fantasies of all time, but until now the sequels to it have been mediocre at best. This fourth book about the world of the far future is somewhere in between; it's not going to be a classic,

COMING IN JANUARY FROM
TOR BOOKS

The triumphant
conclusion of
JACK L.
CHALKER'S
bestselling
new series...

**MASTERS
OF FLUX &
ANCHOR**


SOUL
BOOK THREE:
RIDER

Now, learn the hidden truth of the world of Flux and Anchor.

SOUL RIDER—the stunning creation of a master storyteller is now complete.
Look for it. Read it. You'll never forget it.



SOUL RIDER BOOK ONE: SPIRITS OF FLUX & ANCHOR
SOUL RIDER BOOK TWO: EMPIRES OF FLUX & ANCHOR
SOUL RIDER BOOK THREE: MASTERS OF FLUX & ANCHOR
ALL \$2.95

TOR BOOKS  WE'RE PART OF THE FUTURE

but it has some of the spark of the original. It consists of three novelets (or novellas if you prefer; I've never liked that designation). "The Murthe," "Fader's Waft," and "Morreion" concern a group of magicians who have banded into an uneasy alliance to promote their joint interests and prevent destruction from their mutual antagonisms. The stories rely more on the author's word-magic than they do on logical plots; but the magic is there — often enough, anyway, to keep me reading. Recommended.

Native Tongue

by Suzette Haden Elgin
DAW, \$3.50 (paperback)

Two ideas combined here: one that the legal status of women will revert, more or less, to that of 17th- or 18th-century Europe, and the other that the best way to learn a strange language is to grow up with it. The first seems improbable; the second is generally accepted. In this case, it's being applied to learning alien languages; a baby is introduced to a cooperative alien, and in time becomes a translator of that alien language for all important business and political meetings. The specialization becomes hereditary; there are "linguist" families. And the women of these families, during the course of the novel, are planning and executing a small, quiet, and undetected rebellion against male domination. The society, and most of the male characters, are among the more unpleasant that I've encountered. (I suspect that Suzette could specify just which actual person each character is based on — but I don't expect her to do it.)

On the whole *Native Tongue* is an excellent book, recommended to anyone but those males who react violently to any hint of feminism.

Homecoming

by John Dalmás
The Scroll of Man
by John Dalmás
Tor, \$2.95 each (paperback)

Dalmás's novel *The Yngling* was serialized in *Analog* in 1969, and I still have moderately fond memories of it. *Homecoming* is a sequel to it; the landing of the starmen, predicted at the close of the first book, occurs in this one. If you're looking for deep meanings or complicated emotions, pass it up; but it's a very good adventure story: supermen can be fun when they're well handled, and this one is.

Scroll presents a different sort of superman: the man of the present who is somehow whisked into the far future, where he solves everyone's problems. It's an inherently unbelievable plot, but Ed Hamilton and others have used it to good effect, and Dalmás does a competent job. The only drawback is that it's a bit obvious that our hero is doing everything; I kept wondering if the Guardians had been twiddling their thumbs for three million years, waiting for him to come along. (Conclusion; it's fun to read, but don't analyze it.) On the whole it's a quite adequate adventure, but *Homecoming* is superior.

Damnations

edited by Ron Leming
The Strange Company,
Box 864, Madison, WI 53701
\$9.95, (trade paperback)

This large-sized, skinny book is a tribute to *Weird Tales*, and it's a much better one than I expected it to be; it's a notch up from the semi-pro fantasy mags that I read occasionally, though the list of authors is much the same. It's not filled with marvelous stories designed to become classics; but then, neither was *Weird*, which published a

We're More Than Simply

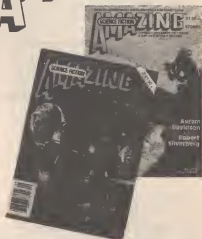
SCIENCE FICTION
AMAZING
STORIES

A WHOLE NEW LOOK!

We're sparing no expense to bring you the best works from the finest science-fiction authors and artists! Our featured writers include Gene Wolfe, Poul Anderson, Robert Silverberg, Tanith Lee, and Ben Bova. Artists include Michael Whelan, Kelly Freas, and Steven Fabian.

AN EXCITING EDITOR!

George Scithers, a four-time Hugo Award winner and former editor of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, is editor of AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories.



(Clip & Mail)

I'm convinced . . . send me my own personal subscription to AMAZING Magazine starting with the next available issue. (Please PRINT clearly)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Prov. _____ Postal Code _____

Country _____

Subscription rates for 6 bi-monthly issues (check one):

- ☐ In the U.S., \$9 per year
- ☐ In Canada, \$11 per year in Canadian dollars
- ☐ Foreign via Surface Mail, \$15 per year in U.S. dollars
- ☐ Foreign via Air Mail, \$30 per year in U.S. dollars

Check one to indicate your choice of payment:

- ☐ Personal check enclosed
- ☐ MasterCard
- ☐ Money order enclosed
- ☐ VISA

Credit Card No. _____

Expiration Date _____ M/C Bank No. _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Mail to: Dragon Publishing, P.O. Box 72089-BL, Chicago, IL 60609. AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories and FANTASTIC™ Stories are trademarks owned by TSR, Inc. ©1984 TSR, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

large number of marvelous stories during its long life, but didn't average one per issue, or anywhere near it. The stories here are short; there are twenty of them in ninety-six large-sized pages. A fair number of them wouldn't have been out of place in the original *Weird*; it's a good average for a small-press publisher. Major weaknesses are a lack of logic in a few stories and a lack of sympathetic characters in several; I find it un-horrifying if the sticky end comes to someone I dislike anyway. Of course, I'm not wildly enthused over horror fiction to begin with; if you are, you might get some chills from this one. Not brilliant, but not bad.

Venus Plus X

by Theodore Sturgeon

Bluejay, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

Darker Than You Think

by Jack Williamson

Bluejay, \$8.95 (trade paperback)

Bluejay Illustrated Editions are reprints of classic works, and these certainly qualify. This time, Sturgeon gets better illustrations, by Rowena Morrill. David Klein's interiors for the Williamson are mostly a good enough evocation of *Weird Tales*, but his cover is unfortunate; all I could think of on seeing it was "There was a young lady of Niger. . . ." The book itself is much better, with werewolves and other shape-changers warring with mankind over possession of a strange Oriental box — but strangely accommodating to the protagonist, for their own reasons. The ending is particularly grim, and unexpected.

Sturgeon's book — like most Sturgeon books — is about love in its various forms. Some of the forms shocked the readership when it was first published in 1960, and it became a sort of instant classic. (Editor Don

Bensen once used it as a defense of the entire Pyramid line of original paperbacks.) Some of the shock value will have eroded over the years; and a lot of us weren't all that shocked at the time; but it's still an interesting idea, a trifle cutesy in spots but generally well handled, and well worth your reading time.

Flatland

by Edwin A. Abbott

Signet, \$2.95 (paperback)

Originally published a hundred years ago, this depiction of a two-dimensional world retains much of its charm. Almost every proponent of the theory of a fourth dimension refers to it, for its account of a two-dimensional being attempting to understand the third dimension is easily seen as an analogy of a three-dimensional being trying to understand the fourth. The plot is simple enough, but the viewpoint is intriguing, even in this allegedly sophisticated age.

Songs From the Ozark Trilogy

by Suzette Haden Elgin

Song At the Ready

by Suzette Haden Elgin

Ozark Center for Language Studies,
Route 4, Box 192-E
Huntsville, AR 72740

\$7.00 each (60-min. cassette tapes)

Presumably those who have read Suzette's Ozark Trilogy novels will be more interested in the songs relating to it, but the "Ready" tape is the better of the two. Recording quality isn't up to professional standards on either one, but the voice is very good. (I'm not normally fond of sopranos, but I make an exception now and then.) The "Ready" tape has a greater variety of material and, I think, better songs. "When I Was A Young Girl" is certainly the best song about singing and

singers that I've ever heard. The Ozark songs are good; but they apply pretty specifically to the books, and those particular characters. If you can put up with mediocre sound quality (I grew up with 78 rpm records, so it didn't bother me in the least), these are excellent tapes. Recommended.

Rifles & Rymes

by Juanita Coulson

Off Centaur Publications,
Box 424, El Cerrito, CA 94530
\$9.00 (60-min cassette tape)

I'm prejudiced here, of course, but most people who have heard the tape seem to agree with me that it's outstanding. The songs are from the poetry of Martha Keller, and they're not science-fictional; they're history. They cover a time period from the death of Cortez through World War II,

and along with some of the major events and people of the period they include the concerns of the average pioneer, mill-owner, housewife, etc. The tape is a history lesson as well as a collection of modern folksongs.

Burning With A Vision: Poetry of Science and the Fantastic

edited by Robert Frazier

Owlswick Press,
\$14.95 (hardcover),
\$8.75 (trade paperback)

I loathe the sort of modern poetry
Which is allegedly insightful and
inspiring

And is couched in lines like these.
I occasionally write doggerel
Which would never be considered
for a book like this.

But if it was, I'd refuse permission.

by Patrick L. Price & Roger Raupp

Castles

artwork by Alan Lee,

text by David Day

Bantam, \$24.95 (cloth)

From noted fantasy artist Alan Lee comes *Castles*, another visually stunning gift book from Bantam Books. Captivated since his childhood by the beauty of historic and fantastic castles, Lee has assembled a collection of his drawings and water colors which reflect his fascination with these structures.

Most of Lee's drawings — whether inspired by myth, folklore, or romances — have been accurately rendered. Lee has paid close attention to architectural design when illustrating a castle from history, and to literary detail when illustrating one from legend. Particularly interesting

are his interpretations of Heorot the Golden, of Camelot, and of Minas Tirith. Each of these renditions reflects the style and feeling of the period, historical or literary. In general, the artwork effectively presents a dreamy atmosphere in a style reminiscent of such nineteenth-century Romantic artists as Gustave Doré.

Accompanying Lee's artwork is the prose written by David Day. The text for *Castles* is divided into three sections: the Age of Myth, the Age of Romance, and the Age of Fantasy. The legends and tales presented are supplementary material for the lavish illustrations.

The first section presents synopses of various Norse and Celtic myths, with emphasis on the castles of gods,

giants, and faery kingdoms. "The Ice Castle of Utgard-Loke" is a special favorite for its interpretation of the constant struggle between the Norse gods of Asgard and the giants of Jotunheim.

The romance section deals with legends about Arthurian Camelot and the Knights of the Round Table, about Carolinian Aix-la-Chapelle and the mighty paladins, about the Rhine castles of the *Nibelungenlied* and their Burgundian princes. Castles of this period are sometimes viewed as allegories, often alluding to the ethos of the pure Christian Knight. In the tale "The Castle of the Maidens," for example, the knight becomes the image of Christ as he frees the souls in Purgatory. In other instances, castles are symbols of courtly love and chivalry. Sir Lancelot's devotion to

Guinevere in "The Castle of Gorre" is a prime example of such chivalrous love.

When gunpowder and cannon brought about the decline of castles, the imagination took over, and castles became the domain of fantasy. The final section of the book describes those castles found in modern literature. The reader visits all sorts of imaginary edifices: from the fairy-tale towers of Childe Rowland and Burd Ellen to the gothic structure of the House of Usher.

Finally, at the end of *Castles* is a lengthy bibliography, useful for those who wish to do more reading or research on the subject.

This fine collection of artwork and tales is highly recommended for those who have always enjoyed the magic and mystery inherent in castles. ❧



Well, yes; we *are* looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000-word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to assist you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us \$2.50; three copies, \$3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is \$2.00. If you subscribe to *Amazing® Science Fiction Stories* today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

Order from us here at *Amazing® Science Fiction Stories*, P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

DISCUSSIONS

by the Readers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Isn't it splitting hairs a bit to insist that each page have "... last name and abbreviated story title and page number" when it would suffice to have the title and page number?

Also, with the new capabilities of word processing and computers, sooner or later the printing profession will have to accept "the facts of life": dot-matrix and changing fonts (e.g.: *italics* and **bold face**) are here to stay. After all, typesetters and printers have been using Xerox and A.B. Dick machines that have made letterpress virtually extinct over the last few years! As a matter of fact, we of The Freelance Editors' Association of Canada (I am also a member of the Writers' Association of Canada) are in the process of organizing seminars, etc., to explore and discuss computer applications in the industry.

So, while it is true that a "tired, grey ribbon" will make bold face hard to distinguish from regular face without proofreaders' marks, how can you mistake italics for anything but italics? I.e.: is it *really* necessary to still indicate the latter by underlining?

Sincerely,
Cheryl Applebaum
Willowdale, Ontario

No, it's not "splitting hairs" to ask that manuscript pages be identified in a standard, useful way: it's lots easier to find a manuscript with the author's name than with the title. If your word processor is all that clever and

advanced, you shouldn't have any trouble convincing it to do things that way.

May we call our attention to Mark Twain's Rule Thirteen for writing? "Use the right word, not its second cousin." Typesetters have nothing to do with making letterpresses rare over the past few years; Xerox and A.B. Dick haven't either — it's the medium-sized offset-lithographic press that has displaced the bulk of letterpress printing over the past 40 years — and neither of those firms makes presses in that range.

The linotype hot-lead typesetting machine is what's become nearly extinct, partly because of the shift from letterpress to offset lithography, partly because of the development of "cold type," and that by such companies as Varitype and IBM, and then by the big typesetting-machine manufacturers like Mergenthaler and so on.

And in fact this magazine is typeset by a computer of advanced design: it's a Quadex, made by the Compugraphic Corporation — and it's a dot-matrix machine, only the dots are so finely spaced that you can't tell they're dots. The typefaces of the various fonts are adapted from designs that have been developed and refined over the past 300 years or so.

What is constant throughout all this is the typesetter or compositor herself — and the need to place before her, pages and pages of text which can — quite literally — be read word for word and letter for letter. And the designers

of most dot-matrix printers for the personal-computer market haven't the slightest interest in meeting that need. One all-too-common kind of dot-matrix printer makes the letters "a," "e," and "s" out of parallel, horizontal lines; all that distinguishes these very very common letters are a few dots at the ends of those lines. Others, though making these three letters more distinguishable, make the "o," the "p," the "q," the "b," and the "d" out of a square with a few (or no) extra dots at one corner. The result: material that is unnecessarily hard to read, especially to those of us who have to read reams and reams of manuscript.

In the matter of underlining instead of shifting to an italic font whilst preparing a manuscript — for one thing, everyone can underline; not everyone can shift fonts while typing; and uniformity of format is an enormous advantage to the typesetter — and for another, italic type faces are both harder to read and harder to notice than simple underlining.

In short, dot matrix — which is to say the crude, hard-to-read dot matrix that can be instantly recognized as dot matrix precisely because it's hard to read — is NOT here to stay. This generation of near-illegible dot-matrix printers is overdue for replacement by printers whose output is designed to be read, not merely looked at. And as for dot matrix with a worn-out ribbon — that gets sent back unread.

— George H. Scithers

Dear George,

If Carol Deppe's stories are anyways near as funny as her letters, I am looking forward to seeing some of them in the near future. I even considered advising you to hire her as a columnist, but sanity prevailed: you'd just cut the book reviews some more to

make room for her, and I don't think that anyone is funny enough to give up part of my income for.

I can agree with Silverberg all the way, but he left out the Nerd As Hero story, by authors who feel that it doesn't depict Real Life unless everybody in it is moronic or unpleasant or both.

Robert Coulson
2677-W — 500-N
Hartford City IN 47348

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I enjoy *Amazing*® very much. I think it is one of the best SF magazines in print today.

I have a suggestion: Maybe once a year, publish a piece of classic SF or fantasy that's appeared over the years in *Amazing*? Like A. Merritt's "Moon Pool," Asimov's "Marooned off Vesta," and Williamson's "The Metal Man" for example?

Also, if any reader out there is interested, I'm looking for someone (like myself, in their early to mid-teens) to collaborate with on SF and fantasy stories. I've written nine of my own with no success, but I just wrote two that have great chances at selling.

I've got lots of good story ideas and I'm looking for somebody (male or female) who's written and submitted stories to magazines, but never been published.

Thank you,
Jack Lowe
4-N-139 Robbie Lane
Addison IL 60101

We read your letter with interest. As for reprints in the magazine, your suggestion (alas) betrays the fact that you were not reading Amazing® as recently as two years ago. The magazine had a reprint feature under Elinor Mavor and has, over the years, been

very heavily into reprints. "Marooned off Vesta" has been reprinted in *Amazing*® at least twice, most recently in March 1982. "The Metal Man" was reprinted, and it's also available in the book *The Early Williamson*. The short version of "The Moon Pool" did not appear in *Amazing*® at all. The novel-length was a reprint from another source when it appeared in our pages way way back in 1927. In any case, we could hardly reprint a whole novel.

Some time ago, however, Dr. Asimov, Professor Greenberg, and ourselves began discussing an anthology of outstanding stories from early (and middle) issues of the magazine; we had decided to go in this direction well before we received your letter.

As for collaborating, if you can't sell your stories, finding a collaborator who can't sell his either isn't a solution — but you have realized that any collaboration — to work — must be between people of comparable talent and experience. Collaborations are harder than they appear — for one, it's not workable for one person to provide the ideas and the other to put them into salable form; both parties must be able to write salable stories. For another, you must find someone with whom you are incredibly simpatico, and then each of you must do 80% of the work — that's right — each do 80% of the work it would take for either one to do the story alone. We have an interview with Parke Godwin and Marvin Kaye, to appear soon, which reveals a lot about the process.

If you'd like to join an organization of fellow would-be writers for shop talk about writing, try *The Small Press Writers & Artists*, attn: John Postovit, 3001 North Second St., Fargo ND 58102.

— Darrell Schweitzer

Dear Jeremy Slithers,

In re the November 1984 issue of *Amazing*®, which arrived in July 1984 (how refreshing):

I liked, I mean REALLY liked, Larry Walker's lead story, "One Final Dragon." It was very satisfyingly snarky, as was "But Wait! There's More." Have Stutzman and Friesner tried Aunt Neutrino's Neutron Star Cakes? A solar system in every bite . . . guaranteed to fill the black hole in your tummy. . . .

George Barr's illustration, page 121, was also hilarious.

Will the January 1985 issue come in September 1984? It's really exciting to be able to see a little bit into the future like this.

Yours,
Kiel Stuart
12 Skylark Lane
Stony Brook NY 11790

Dear Editors,

I recently met Mr. Davidson at Viking Con 5. He lives in Bellingham, where I go to school; and I see him occasionally, as he is involved with a fan group there.

In case you're interested, the stories I've read in the magazine I enjoyed the most were: Gerald Pearce's "In the Sumerian Marshes," Jack C. Halderman II's "On the Rebound," and Bruce Bethke's "Cyberpunk."

As far as my work goes, I'm basically trying to find my own voice. As the material I've sent you in the past suggests, I'm working through a variety of modes to learn the craft. I write them and send them off. And if I keep at it, I know I will establish myself.

Sincerely,
Kent Martens
Ferndale WA

That's the right attitude: work at it,



It's
AMAZING . . .



. . . what we've got in store for you!

A limited quantity of back issues of **AMAZING®** Science Fiction Stories is available through The Mail Order Hobby Shop. Just take a look at the order form on the right-hand page of this ad, then check the lines of those issues you'd like to order. If you want more than one copy of a specific issue, write the number of copies on that issue's line.

The price of an offering is listed after the name of the issue. Be sure to add the appropriate shipping and handling charges, which can be found at the bottom of this page. Then, clip and mail the order form to: The Mail Order Hobby Shop, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

SHIPPING & HANDLING CHARGES

Please include the following payment for shipping & handling:

	For U.S., APO, & FPO orders:	For Canadian orders:	For orders outside U.S. and Canada:	
Total merchandise cost is between	Shipping & handling cost	Shipping & handling cost	Surface mail cost	Air mail cost
\$.01 to \$20.00	\$3.00	\$ 6.50	\$ 7.25	\$26.50
\$20.01 to \$30.00	\$4.00	\$ 9.50	\$ 9.90	\$38.75
\$30.01 to \$40.00	\$4.50	\$11.50	\$12.25	\$47.25
\$40.01 or more	\$5.50	\$13.25	\$13.75	\$58.50

ISSUES AVAILABLE

___ Jan. 1983, \$1.50	___ Mar. 1984, \$1.75
___ Mar. 1983, \$1.50	___ May 1984, \$1.75
___ July 1983, \$1.50	___ July 1984, \$1.75
___ Sept. 1983, \$1.50	___ Sept. 1984, \$1.75
___ Nov. 1983, \$1.50	___ Nov. 1984, \$1.75
___ Jan. 1984, \$1.75	___ Jan. 1985, \$1.75

(Please PRINT all information plainly.)

Name _____

Address* _____

City _____

State/Prov. _____ Zip _____

Country _____

Date _____

* Please use street address, not a P.O. Box number.

Check one to indicate your choice of payment

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check enclosed | <input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money order enclosed | <input type="checkbox"/> Visa |

Credit Card No. _____

M/C Bank No. _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Allow six to eight weeks for delivery.

AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories is a registered trademark owned by TSR, Inc.

try a variety of ways to write (. . . there are nine and sixty ways / of constructing tribal lays / and every single one of them is right! . . .), and don't expect too much too soon. David Gerrold argues that one should consider one's first million words to be just for practice; when a woman asked, "Then what about this check I received for selling my third story?" he replied, "Go ahead and spend the money; that's practicing too."

It also helps to have lived through some of the things you're writing about — like falling in and out of love, growing up, learning better — and then noticing how other people live through these as well.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I thought I had supplied you with enough ridiculous letters to last you at least half a year, if you wanted to print that sort of thing. So what happens? So you USE THEM ALL UP IN ONE ISSUE!

I'll bet you're the kind of person who buys a five-pound box of chocolate, and then eats the whole thing in one night.

Kind of fun, though.

Imagine my chagrin at being informed that SFWA stands for Science Fiction Writers of America, *not* Science Fiction Writers Anonymous, as I had supposed. How embarrassing!

You see, I'd never intended to write SF. That first SF story was Just An Accident. Afterwards, I shoved it in the mail and tried to forget the whole unsettling business. But I kept getting these strange cravings to write *more* SF stories. Within a few months it was clear that the whole thing was Out Of Hand.

So I *am* disappointed that there is no Science Fiction Writers Anonymous. I

thought, you know, that there would be a local chapter with a hot line that I could call in an emergency — that someone would come over and hold my hand — or maybe hold both hands and unplug the typewriter. And I imagined that there would be weekly sessions where I could meet with others who had this problem, and we could all talk about the stories we weren't going to write.

But I haven't given up! I've just heard about writer's clubs. I gather that people who belong to writer's clubs get together all the time and talk about writing instead of doing it. That might be just what I need. I gather that they also do a lot of breast-beating, though. And that breast-beating sounds like a lot of work to me. Is it obligatory, I wonder? If it's obligatory, I guess I'd just as soon bite the bullet and just do the writing, and forget the clubs and breast-beating.

There's so much to learn!

I was interested in what you had to say about the paperclips. When I sent you those two manuscripts with the little paperclips, and they came back with big paperclips, I *did* begin to suspect that paperclip size matters. I hypothesized that editors detest little paperclips; but being individuals, they express their dislikes variously. Schmidt, Datlow, and McCarthy simply steal or destroy or eat the little paperclips half the time. Scithers affably transforms them into big ones. (I thought that was a neat trick; I figured the dragons do it. Perhaps anyone who hangs around the *Amazing*[®] editorial office or lolls around on the stationery gets put to work.)

I decided to test my hypothesis. So the next batch of manuscripts all went out with great huge paperclips — even the dinky five-page manuscripts bore

great huge paperclips and full-sized manila envelopes.

So what did the editors do? I'll tell you what those editors did. **THIS TIME THEY STOLE EVERY ONE OF THE PAPERCLIPS.** Backwards progress.

Finally, in frustration, I decided to write and ASK those editors what was going on with the paperclips. So I drafted a letter —

Dear Editor,

Just **WHAT DO YOU DO WITH ALL THOSE PAPERCLIPS** that you don't return with the stories?

Sincerely,

But I decided that that was a little too blunt. So I tore it up and tried again. This time I was more subtle —

Dear Editor,

During the last few months, I've sent you x-many stories.

About half the stories came back without the paperclips.

After all this experience I feel that I am finally starting to understand your editorial needs.

Therefore enclosed please find ten paperclips with no story.

If you would prefer some other size or some other kind of metal, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

Well . . . the more I looked at that one the more I was sure that it would be a mistake. Trouble is, at least one of those editors would be sure to place a large order for more paperclips with no more stories. In fact, quite possibly all of 'em would. I just don't trust any science-fiction editor to be sober and serious.

So I tore that letter up too.

For a while I gave up in frustration. But then this morning, I had a new

idea. Eagerly I rushed to the library and grabbed the New York City Yellow Pages. Trembling, I searched for Schmidt's and Datlow's and McCarthy's under the listing for scrap metal dealers.

But they weren't there. So it's not that, either.

It sure is puzzling. . . .

Love and kisses,
Carol Deppe
Corvallis OR

We confess we've become addicted to your "weird" letters. (Note spelling: you keep getting it as "wierd.")

As for paperclips, well, you may recall the Avram Davidson story of yore about the strange habits of metal objects. A paperclip is an immature coat-hanger, and so on: notice especially that bicycles are almost the only metal objects clearly divided into two sexes! So maybe the reason you don't find McCarthy et alii listed in the scrap metal business is that they're actually waiting till the paperclips grow into coat-hangers and then are selling them in bulk to Bloomingdale's. One never knows.

*Stay weird,
— George H. Scithers*

Dear Mr. Scithers,

Now that you mention it, I *do* recall that Avram Davidson story about the paperclips that grow up into coat-hangers. And I like your suggestion that Datlow and McCarthy and Schmidt are profiteering in paperclips, but that "(they) aren't listed in the scrap metal business . . . (because) they're actually waiting till the paperclips grow into coat-hangers, and then are selling them in bulk to Bloomingdale's."

That really might be the answer! Just imagine! The entire basement of

380 Lexington Avenue might be a holding and fattening pen for *all* the paperclips rustled by *all* the editors of *Analog* and *Asimov's*, and *Ellery Queen's*, and those other Davis magazines.

But we need more data; and I'm continuing to accumulate it, little by little. I do wonder what Stan Schmidt is going to do with my next submission — a skimpy five-page manuscript bound firmly with four large paperclips. Will he steal two? Or will it be all or none?

Just today it occurred to me that perhaps I have a bad attitude about the editors and paperclips, and should be looking at it differently. It's not that all those editors are stealing my paperclips and rejecting my stories. No, not at all. Actually, they are *accepting* the paperclips, though they *are* rejecting the stories. And you guys — it's not enough for you to reject my stories — YOU ARE REJECTING MY PAPERCLIPS ALSO!!!!

HOW DARE YOU! I'm sure my paperclips are just as good as anybody else's. In fact, they're great! I can tell that myself. And besides, other editors love them. Why are you so fussy?

If I were a name writer, I'll bet you'd be happy to accept those very same clips. I wonder what a person has to do to get you guys to accept anything. I'll bet you have to know something, that's what.

What kind of editors are you anyway? **SHAPE UP!**

Love and kisses,
Carol Deppe
Corvallis OR

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I note that in the latest *Analog* editorial, Mr. Schmidt just simply jumps all over people who say "we."

I hope you won't let that bother you

(pl.). Some people are individual and some people are . . . well . . . interestingly multiple.

So don't worry! We (readers) understand!

By the way, you might consider getting your typewriter fixed up. You have simply worn out and used up your "w's."

Sincerely,
Carol Deppe
Corvallis OR

Mark Twain says it's okay for editors to be "we" and "us." And if he says it's okay, then that's the end of it.

— George H. Scithers & Horde

Dear People; [see!]

In Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" column, he discusses the numerous "new" clichés that have entered SF and fantasy in recent years. Mostly, I agree with him, particularly about trilogies. But on one point I do not.

In his discussion of the female villain, he appears to be implying that no woman can be a villain under any circumstances. Why can't women be villains? Don't they have as much right as men to be nasty and evil (or just to oppose the hero, in more sophisticated science fiction?).

Concerning Carol Deppe and paperclips — when I first started sending manuscripts out, I put a paperclip on every one. Nice big ones, too; two inches long. Eventually I stopped. I kept no records, but I figure at least fifty percent of the time my manuscripts came back with no paperclip at all. Another maybe twenty percent came back with (gasp!) a different paperclip.

Also, I don't like getting your subscription form. I understand why you do it . . . but I find almost nothing worse than getting a pitch for a maga-

zine I already subscribe to.

I liked this issue — about the only story I didn't like was "Medium." You have the best illustrations of any of the SF magazines around today.

Sincerely,
Robert Nowall
2730 SE 24th Place
Cape Coral FL 33904

You keep getting the subscription form so that you can go up and down the beaches of Cape Coral and tuck them into the picnic baskets of the visitors from Up North — we assume that you've already wheedled all the neighbors within a reasonable radius into subscribing.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Price:

I am a young author and I would like to submit a story to your magazine. However, I am unsure of how to go about this and I would appreciate it if you could inform me of how to send it in.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,
Scott P. Rex
Phoenix AZ

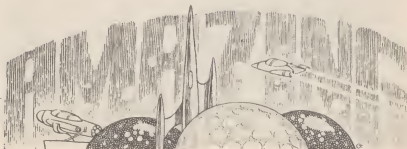
Even if this were a dumb question —

which it is not — it's better to ask a dumb question than to do a dumb thing. A simple question is indeed the way to start. We provide — free — a couple of two-sided sheets of advice on writing and on manuscript preparation (but to be polite, please send us a business-sized envelope, addressed back to yourself, with proper postage affixed to the envelope). For \$2.00 for the first copy, 50¢ for each additional copy in the same order (for which we provide envelope and postage), we'll send you a 32-page, 15,000-word booklet, "Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy," on those topics. Or you can simply subscribe to the magazine and ask for a copy of the booklet, which is free to new subscribers or to ones who renew their subscriptions. Ordering information for booklets and for subscriptions is printed elsewhere in this issue: if you don't want to cut out the order blank, send us the information that the blank asks for along with your payment.

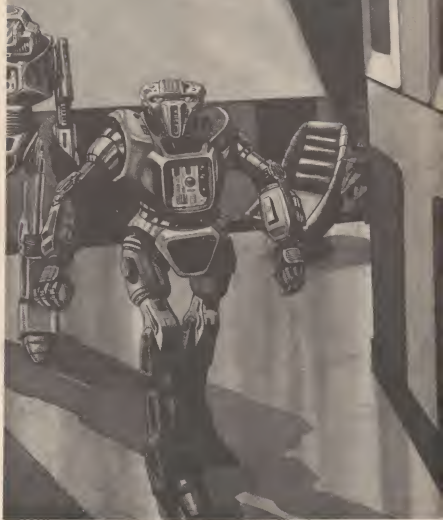
People who regularly read this magazine — so they know this address is current — may send manuscripts (but NOT subscription orders or booklet orders) to us at P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243.

— George H. Scithers

✕



HELLFLOWER
by Eluki bes Shahr
art: Larry Elmore





I was downport in Wanderweb, minding my own business. I'd been booklegging for Factor Oob and had just managed to mislay my cargo at the right price. Damnsilly stuff it was, too, either maintenance manuals or philosophy texts (I 'vetted a couple) but I never did figure out which, 'cep'n each of them, nice and fine, had the Imperial Censor's **INTERDICTED** stamp on the cover.

So I was free, female, and twenty-one, with some time to kill and maybe look up another cargo for a trip in-Spiral, when I saw this greenie, right in front of me in the street. Definitely a toff, and no spacer — you never saw such clothes! He was lit up like the joy district at night, all over silk and jewels and long silver curls — looking like the Sector Governor's fancy-boy, 'cep'n much too tall and covered with heat: blaster, couple'a throwing knives, and this motherless mini-sword across his back flapping in the breeze. This toff was the prettiest thing I'd seen in slightly more than so long, but this being downport, there were eight of K'Jarn's goonies and K'Jarn facing him. I was of the opinion he couldn't do them before they opened him up — *now* I'm not sure, but *then* I hadda go be an idiot and say:

"Good morning, K'Jarn. Airt hiert out to do wetwork these days, or just rolling glitterborn for kicks, hey?"

K'Jarn looked at me and said: "It's none of your business, little girl. Get lost." K'Jarn and I have known each other for a long time. For once, I should've taken his advice. But hell, if they razed a toff in downport there'd be trouble, and it was eight-on-one and I've *never* liked K'Jarn.

"Like Imperial Mercy I will," I said. "Yon laddie's my long-lost lover and my maiden aunt, and I'm taking him home to Mother any day now. Fade."

Just then one of K'Jarn's wingmen got restless and took a swipe at the glitterborn with a vibro-blade. He moved faster than anything human, and I burned K'Jarn before K'Jarn could ace him. K'Jarn dropped his blaster, not having a hand to hold it with anymore, and left on urgent business. Except for the deader the kid made and another 'bo I didn't have time to get pretty with, me an' the glitterborn're alone and the glitterborn's down. I went to roll him over with my boot to see if maybe someone did open him up while my back was turned; he snaked around and — bang! — I was down on my back and he was on top of me holding that baby sword at my throat and sing-singing at me.

I couldn't make head nor hind outta his parley, and I thought at first I'd hit my head too hard, but then I *knew*. I *knew* that I had gone and done the dumbest think in my whole entire life and rescued a hellflower.

It's not that he's bloodydamn tall — he wasn't; about two meters (not having got his full growth, I found out later) — and his white hair and brown skin could come from spacing on a ship with poor shields, but those pretty blue eyes of his . . . there's no other human race in space with eyes the color an alMayne's got. I've fenced Durani skywaters that were paler than this hellflower's glims. In fact it was *obvious* that he's a . . .

Never mind. I *knew* he was a hellflower.

He stared at me, I stared at him, and I didn't think I could get to a weapon with him all over me like that.

I figure I'm dead, and a great reward for my humanitarian instincts, when he rolled off me, put away his sword, and got to his feet.

"*Abroya m'saion, chaudatu*. I did not mean to hurt you; I thought you were one of the others. My thanks —"

"I don't want to hear it!" I interrupted real quick. He talked Interlingua real pretty, but with a heavy accent — alMayne, that kind of lilt — more proof, not that I needed it. "You're okay, fine, I'm glad, hellflower, but don't you go thankin' *me*."

His face got real cold, and I thought I'd bought it for the second time this morning, when he said, "As you desire, *chaudatu*." I watched him stalk off. He *did* glitter.

Hellflowers are crazy.

Strictly speaking, a hellflower is a mercenary from the Azarine Coalition: alMayne, Ghadri, Felix . . . you know, the gung-ho types. Actually, if you say "hellflower" in the nightworld, everyone'll figure it's an alMayne that's caught your fancy. They're crazier than the rest of the Coalition put together. They have their own branch of the Mercenaries' Guild with its own Grandmaster, and when they do sign out for work (as bodyguards, mostly, 'cause there ain't no wars hereabouts, praise be to Imperial Mercy and the love of the Twice-Born) you can follow them around by the blood they leave behind. Other people's. They'll win any fight they start, and they'll start one sooner or later — they're hellflowers, aren't they? — or just kill you in the middle of a pleasant conversation for no reason any of the survivors can see. . . .

They're mad for "honor". You *don't* want one of them beholden to you — that happens, and you can be jawing with a buddy and the 'flower'll cut 'im down and tell you he did it to purify your honor. There was a man, once, who lost six business partners, his cook, his gardener, two 'borgs and a dozen 'tronics to his hellflower bodyguard before he figured out the hellflower liked him . . .

Hellflowers are crazy.

I stopped thinking about hellflowers and went and had breakfast. Didn't wonder about the 'flower; weren't nothin' about that boy going to make sense a-tall. I got a line on somebody who maybe wanted a load slipped in to Kiffit past the Teasers, and half-past meridies I went off to an Arcade to lose some credit.

Even if I didn't expect K'Jarn to be up and around after losing a hand, I should'a expected it, y'know what I mean? I thought I was keepin' care, but all of a sudden it's him on the door, and his sideboy (the one still alive) on the

back door, and nothing for me to do but make it look like I want to be there when K'Jarn comes idling over. I counted six people with him, all sweet for my fair young bod, and everyone else in the Arcade either neutral or in K'Jarn's pocket. It looked like this place was fast becoming no place for my favorite entrepreneur.

K'Jarn leaned over my table at me and made his pitch. I'd cost him a hand, he said. Cybereisis prosthetics were so expensive, he said. Why didn't I just, out of the goodness of my heart and a sincere desire to see justice done, sign over my ship *Firecat* to him and he'd let bygones be bygones.

He was drugged to the gills on painease and maybe R'rh1 and not likely to be reasonable. Neither was I.

"Rot in hell," I said sweetly, and K'Jarn hauled me to my feet with the hand he had left. I sliced him across the chest with the vibro I happened to have handy, but the cut was toodamn shallow to do much good. It did make him drop me, and I rolled under the table while he was bawling for his goons to come smear me into the bedrock.

I gave the first one that came for me a blade through the throat, and by the time I got his blood out of my eyes another one wanted attention. He slugged me and I lost my blade and ended up out in the middle of the floor, feeling slightly more than somewhat abashed.

All of a sudden it was verydamn quiet in the Arcade. I looked up, wondering why my section of floor had gotten lumpy, and there was my bonny alMayne home-ec project towering over me, and the look he gave the general populace would freeze a hot reactor.

Just as things were getting boring, K'Jarn proved everything I'd ever thought of him and drew down on the hellflower. Or maybe it was on me, and he didn't care who was in the way. But the 'flower blew him away, and before K'Jarn hit the floor I was making like he was my backup and I'd been expecting him all along.

It'd be a fair fight now, and the late K'Jarn'd got me mad. But nobody was looking to avenge K'Jarn, and they said so, and that damn near set the hellflower off right there — you could tell he was lookin' to blow them all away for the "lack of honor" of it all — so me and K'Jarn's ex-sideboy Kev1 called it quits real quick and the late K'Jarn's faction made itself history.

As soon as we were alone I started to tell the hellflower I was glad he showed up and saved my chitlins and by the way why did he? He just stared at me and said, "I don't want your gratitude either, *chaudatu*," and stomped off again, looking grand and impractical.

Crazy. Totally out to lunch. And unreasonable besides. I paid off the Arcade people, washed up, and went out the back. Turned out nobody had any interest in me, and there wasn't a whistle down the nightworld gossip lines about my alMayne. Life was rich. I decided to maybe leave Wanderweb without a cargo. And I'd call my alMayne "Tiggy" in my memoirs.

I firmed up arrangements to take somebody's never-you-mind to Kiffit, and three days later I went back to the same Arcade. Morbid curiosity. The bartender told me the slugs took my partner a day and another day ago and he thought I'd like to know. Great. Turned out my hellflower lover sassed the authorities right quick after leaving me and left three dead Wanderweb Guardsmen on the ground before they took him away. On Wanderweb, if you've got the money to pay the fines, you can get away with anything but killing a cop. So of course Tiggy'd killed three of them. Bright lad. Now my darling holcard was being held somewhere in a box with locks until his trial, after which they would execute him and put his head on a pike. Wanderweb's a Free Port — no Imperial Justice here.

Hell.

What was I supposed to do about it? It was all his fault. I didn't tell him to dust half a six-pack of Wanderweb Guardsmen. *Nobody* kills Wanderweb Guardsmen.

Stupid kid.

So he'd saved my hash in the Arcade t'other day — and been cokin' top-lofty about it too! Gormless downsider. Why'd the 'tender hafta tell me about him? Everybody in the Imperium knows I don't partner (not that they know of, anyway), least of all with a hellflower, and even-more-least with one who dresses like a joy-house in riot and wears enough gelt to finance a small war. Do I look stupid? Do I look rich? Why do people tell me these things?

"Pal, why do people tell me these things?"

"You have an honest face?"

"If you like freckles." I was back in my ship *Firecat*, talking to the partner I do have, Paladin. Pally's a real knight in shining armor — a self-aware volitional logic black-boxed into *Firecat*'s infrastructure. Sometimes, just to oblige me, he serves as ship's computer, but he isn't one. He's not a cyborg, either, even if he is plastic — what he is, is very illegal, and the bounty on him — and on me for having him — might almost be enough to buy Tiggy out of stir. Not that I'd be alive to do it, then. And anyway, you don't sell out your friends.

"So what am I going to do about it?" I asked him.

Paladin ran a sigh through his voder. "I don't see what you *can* do about it. He's in the Justiciary building, and I can't crack the Justiciary computers — which means you can't change his sentence or even find out exactly where he is."

"I could if I could get inside," I told him.

"Cap'n," Paladin said warningly.

"It's not like I don't know the place."

"Cap'n St. Cyr . . ."

"I've been in there with Sardi — it's easy to get into the administration

wing; the only trouble is getting onto the detention levels. You can get into the City Central Computers, Pally — the plans for the Justiciary'll be there —"

"*Captain Butterflies-are-free Peace Sincere*, you are not seriously suggesting that you're going to break into the Wanderweb Security Facility to rescue an alMayne mercenary?"

"Well . . ."

"*Why?* You swore you weren't ever going back in there again. Least of all for 'some dauncy hellflower who'd love to cut my heart out if he could figure a way around his honor to do it.' "

"*I said that?*"

"Yup."

"About Tiggy?"

"Yup."

"But Pally, think of the expression on his face when he sees who's rescued him."

I wasn't doing the pretty by this glitterborn, make few mistakes about it. I didn't *like* Tiggy. If he wanted to blow away K'Jarn it was his business. He'd probably wandered into the Arcade by mistake. In my business you do *not* make friends and be an angel of mercy — and I wasn't grateful, not to Tiggy. No, I just wanted to see his face when I noodled him. That's all.

Oh I was going to *enjoy* this. My cargo for Kiffit could wait.

It was just after mid-dark when I pulled my rented 'speeder up to the public docking in front of the Wanderweb Justiciary. I paid for a whole day's space. Even in my wildest fantasies I didn't think I could just bust in there and pick up Tiggy and walk out.

I could try, though.

The top twelve floors of the Justiciary had closed the end of First Shift and it was now almost the end of Second, but Detention Administration and Detention itself were underground, and they never slept. I admired the pretty statues and the nice murals on the walls while I waited for the lift. Wanderweb, city of progress.

One level down it was a different story — looked like Peacekeeper stations the Galaxy over, with the small difference that the only uniforms in sight were the gaudy red-and-blue of the Guardsmen. I went to the Desk Officer at Receiving and told him I was sure my First Officer was here and I'd come to bail him out. He asked me when he'd been brought in and I said I didn't know, only when I'd gone to lift ship he wasn't around. I'd checked the morgue, I said, and he wasn't there.

Same old story: idiot High Jump Captain and her rakehelly crew. It'd all check, too; I'd told him mostly the truth, and if *Firecat* didn't crew sixteen, well, thanks to Paladin he'd never know. He sent me in-level to Fees and

Records and told me to hurry, 'coz they were just about to shut down for the day, and if I got there after they closed I'd have to come back tomorrow at the beginning of First Shift.

Ha.

I skipped over there, trying to look like no one who was carrying a sole-noid stunner under her jacket and grabbed a poor overworked bureaucrat who worked in Records. I spun him my tale about the missing First Mate — a Hamat he was, now, 'coz they're fairly rare and there shouldn't be one here right now. Of course the poor sod couldn't find him in the listings and of course I couldn't remember when he could possibly have come in. The 'cratty kept swearing my Mate wasn't here and looking at the 'chrono — it was almost end-of-shift, remember? — and I kept insisting and being just short of nasty enough that he'd call the Guardsmen and put *me* in the slammer too. Finally he grabbed me and dragged me around to his side of the CRT and pointed at the screen.

"I tell you, Captain — there are no Hamati *in* here!"

I looked. It was an intake list for the last three days, broken down by Breeding-Population-of-Origin. There were no Hamati, twenty-seven Fenshee, and one alMayne. I memorized his file number.

"But he's got to be here!" I insisted, in my best wringing-her-pale-hands-and-moaning voice. "Look, why don't you look again — maybe you got his B.P.O. wrong. He doesn't look much like a Hamat. . . ."

"What does he look like?" demanded the long-suffering clerk.

"Well," I began, improvising, "he's about a meter-fifty tall, striped. . . ."

"There *are* no meter-fifty tall Hamati!" he thundered.

"Well, he *told* me he was a Hamat! How am I supposed to know —"

"Look, Captain, if you'll just come back tomorrow —"

"But I have to lift tonight!" I wailed. "I've got to have him back tonight! Look, don't you keep pictures or something? I could look. . . ."

"One thousand and some-very-odd beings have been processed through here in the last three days!" my uncivil servant snapped.

"I *told* you what he looks like: he's striped, and he has a long tail, and blue eyes. . . ."

"*Hamati do not have tails!*"

"Y" just gotta *look* for him. . . ."

"*All right!*" said my lad. "We keep hard-copy images of detainees. I'll find you a list of all the fur-bearing sentients —"

"Striped. With a tail. And blue eyes."

"— that have come in in the last few days and *then* will you believe that your —"

"He's not *mine*, exactly —"

"— is not here? Will you go away?"

"Sure," I said, and watched him disappear, a broken man, into the inner room.

As soon as he was gone I punched up the retrieval codes on the alMayne's file — it was Tiggy all right, who else? — and found that he'd already been tried and sentenced and was awaiting execution when the Lord High Executioner came on First Shift later today. And I found where my little alMayne lovestar was.

Restoring the terminal to its original state, I lightfooted over to a cabinet I'd cased as the most likely place to hide while I'd been stringing the red-taper. Praying to Fate that I'd fit inside the thing and that Laughing Boy wouldn't open it, I jerked open the door.

It was about three-quarters as tall as me and completely empty. I ducked into it and shut the door. Just as I was letting out a sigh of relief, Chuckles the clone came back into the room.

"Captain, there are no — where did she go?" There was a stricken silence for a moment and then I heard a furious muttering and sounds of grabbing-your-jacket-and-getting-ready-to-leave. And well he *should* complain. I'd kept him a whole five minutes past quitting time with my silly tale, and he was so mad he didn't even stop to wonder where I'd gotten to.

In my business, it's always a good idea to be a student of human nature. I heard the door hiss shut behind him and started counting my heartbeats. When I got to a thousand I started over, and when I'd done that three times I figured all sentient life and most of the bureaucrats were gone from this section. The only thing that would be out would be mechanicals, and I had a way to deal with them, I hoped.

I eased up a little from my tight crouch and pulled the comlink out of my jacket pocket. It was about the size of my hand, rectangular and flat, and would hang around my neck very nicely from the short cord I'd put on it. I pulled the headset out of the same pocket, shifted again to keep the stunner from poking into my back quite so much, plugged the jack into the comlink, and put the headset on.

"Pally," I whispered, "you hear me?"

"I hear you, Cap'n," he said in my ear. I was mildly elated. It worked! Through the 'link Paladin could pick up any challenges the guard-tronics might make and answer them in their own language. A neat trick, considering he'd be docked in Wanderweb Free Port t'other side of the city the whole time, but Paladin's special.

"Time to move out," I told him, and eased the door open. No alarms, nothing — just a dark empty office with faint Third-Shift illumination. I hoped that didn't mean there were organic guards down here too, or Tiggy'd just have to forget about being rescued and I'd have to start thinking seriously about a career of being dead. I eased the door all the way open and stuck my head out. Still nothing.

I was about to step out onto the floor, when Paladin whispered in my ear: "Waitaminnit." I waited. "There's something there." I froze.

It was about a meter across, less than half that high, and it squatted malev-

olently in the middle of the floor glaring impersonally at everything there. It didn't seem to notice me.

What was it? I didn't dare ask Paladin — it might react to the sound of my voice — and if it were broadcasting anything he could read, he would have told me already, so talking to him wouldn't have done me any good anyway, much as it might have improved my nerves.

I couldn't stand here all night. I swung the door all the way open. It crashed against the wall with a well-oiled thud that damn near made my heart stop, but Spidey didn't say 'boo.'

Well, it must not be sensitive to noise.

Rescuing Tiggy was seeming stupider by the nanosecond.

What would set off the guard-tronic? Sound hadn't, motion hadn't; it couldn't be thermo-sensitive — there are too many saurian races in the Galaxy for the old body-heat dodge to work — what was left?

Vibration? If I set foot on that floor how long would it be before I was up to my absent blasters in Guardsmen? That had to be Spidey's secret. There wasn't anything else I could think of.

Great, kiddo, now all you have to do is get out of here without walking across the floor. And pick the lock how? Hanging from the ceiling by your heels? I looked up. There wasn't even anything to hang from.

What there was, was an air vent. It was just below the ceiling, a little to the left in the wall above the top of the cabinet, big enough to hold me on a skinny day if I gave up breathing, and definitely sent by Fate to aid the antics of her wayward child.

"What is it?" Paladin demanded in my ear. "Cap'n? What is it?"

"Spider-mech. Guard-tronic pressure-sensor, I think. I'm going to go through the air vents instead," I told him in a bare whisper.

We will pass lightly over my climbing to the top of the cabinet, my leaning 'way out over into infinite space to get the grill off the vent, *not* dropping the bolts on the floor, and managing to get a grab on the edge of the vent-shaft to pull myself in. Once in and well-hidden from casual eyeballing, I just sat until all my muscles stopped trembling.

"Pally? How long have I been here?"

"Hour-five. Are you sure this is a good idea, kiddo?"

"This is one hell of a time to bring *that* up, little buddy," I told him, and started inching along the shaft. I was glad I could still hear him; I'd worried that going into the vent would cut off his transmission. I already knew that going into primary detention would. That bloc would be shielded from everything, much less a little comlink.

Six subjective eternities and the loss of the knees of my pants later, I came to a promising grill. It looked down — from a good five meters — on what seemed to be a courtroom. One of the sentencing areas, I guessed.

The room was full of 'tronics. I angled around to where Paladin could

pick up their chatter and waited for him to tell me it was impossible.

"You're in luck, boss," he told me a few minutes later. "As far as I can see, they're housekeeping- and guard-tronics — nothing else. This is their central dispatch area. They're programmed to keep out of each other's way — as long as I can provide them with their challenge/recognition code, you can just walk across the floor and out the other side; no sweat."

"So what if you can't?"

"Then you get shot, of course. But they're *stupid!* They don't care about anything but getting the codes. Just move slowly, like another 'tronic."

I didn't like this. For one thing, I wasn't sure if I could keep from bumping into one of them. It was dark down there. Mechanicals, as a rule, do not bump into one another.

"Is there any other way, Pally?" I asked him.

"Sure. You could give up and go home. But the only way in is through the sentencing wing. Believe me, they'll never know."

Well, if he said there wasn't any other way in, there wasn't. I got a pocket-laser out of my bag of tricks and took out the grill, eased out through the hole until I was hanging by my fingers, and then dropped-and-rolled.

I came up with my stunner in my hand trying to see in the near-dark. I heard the whine of servomotors as a guard waddled over to me, and I held my breath and swore it was a stupid idea to come here and that if I ever got out alive I would never do it again. The 'tronic was standing right in front of me: a hand-span taller than I was and much wider, with all of the come-alongs and keep-aways and don't-worrays arrayed neatly on its chest and arms. Its optical sensors glowed red in the dark, but most of its dull-gray hide was lost in the gloom. I wished I'd brought night-goggles but I just hadn't thought of them. On the other hand, if I died here I wouldn't need them.

The guard-tronic turned and walked away.

"Told you," Paladin sang smugly in my ear. "He bought it."

I didn't bother to comment.

The grill had let me out just above the judge's bench, and the door I wanted was — of course — at the opposite side of the room. I was challenged twice more — once by another guard, once by a housekeeper — and each time Paladin answered for me. I activated the small access door set into the big courtroom doors and slipped out.

The hall outside was pitch-black.

"Great," I muttered, staring/not staring into the dark. "Now what do I do?" I knew which way I was supposed to be going, but I couldn't see a damn thing.

"Hm." Paladin made a noncommittal sound, just to let me know he was still there. All of the information we had on the Justiciary had said it was kept partially illuminated at night, on all levels. This was a helluva time for them to economize. I wondered if I wanted to finally throw caution to the winds

and use my belt-lamp.

I heard steps coming toward me in the dark, and more steps coming up behind me — one the quick clamping footsteps of a guard, the other the whining treads of a housekeeper.

I solenoid-scrambled the guard right between its little red eyes and then whipped out another shot to about where I figured its chest would be. For a stunner, my piece worked pretty good on 'tronics. The guard-bot hit the ground with a clatter, and the housekeeper nuzzled up to my ankles and then went around me.

I decided I was leading a charmed life and went for my lamp. By its faint glow I could see the housekeeper dutifully disemboweling the ex-security-bot. Once I'd 'killed' it, Paladin just told the housekeeper *I* was a security-bot, and it, idiot child that it was, was now removing evidence of my presence.

I leaned back against the wall, watching it work as I stowed my stunner in a more convenient location. The wages of virtue seemed vastly overrated right about now. Well, why was I doing it?

Never mind. And anyway, it was working, wasn't it?

I was getting tired of all this sneaking and hiding. As soon as I got to the detention section my hellflower was in, I'd put 'paid' to all of that — once I was down there, my only hope was to go in fast and loud.

I didn't meet up with any more 'tronics as I reached the lift. Bless the mindless architect who decreed that all the Admin levels of the Justiciary be laid out to the same pattern. This level was classified . . . but the floor plan of the identical level two floors up wasn't. I knew where all the lifts were.

"Here's where we part company, Pally," I said, rubbing my thumb along the edge of the comlink.

"I'll monitor all city-wide communications," he said, not sounding as though he really liked any of this, "and I'll bring you up to date when you come back out."

'When you come back out.' Thanks for the vote of confidence, baby brother. "I won't be long," I promised, and punched for the lift.

As I waited I checked the solenoid stunner one more time. Unlike my blasters, a solenoid stunner could be set to stun, and unlike Tiggy, I did not intend to complicate my life by killing any cops while I was here. Although, come to consider, springing a cop-killer was bound to get me as well-loved as if I'd scragged a few myself. Oh well. It never hurts to be polite.

The lift-door opened and I got in, and then it re-opened on the detention level I'd punched for. I zapped the organic with the stunner and burned down the two guardbots he had with him with his blaster. Then I was past the check-in point and running down a long corridor three tiers high and lined with doors, zapping two more organics and wishing I had Paladin to tell me about all the alarms that they were doubtless raising all over the place.

I finally found Tiggy's cell. It was at the very end, but at least it was on the bottom. Declining subtlety, I switched the setting on my blaster from 'annoy' to 'leave no evidence' and blew the lock out. The door sprang open, and there was my hellflower.

He was chained hand and foot, spread-eagled hanging from the far wall pretty as a holo. They'd taken his jewels and clothing; his gray Det-ish pants were too short and someone'd mislaid his tunic —

— and the look on his face was everything I could have hoped for.

"*Chaudatu*," he finally said, "not you again?"

I think he might have preferred being dead to being rescued . . . at least by me. I found out later what that word *chaudatu* meant. It means "outlander" — except what it *really* means is anyone-who-is-not-a-Mayne-and-therefore-not-a-real-person. Cute. If I'd known that at the time I might not have bothered getting him out. It would'a saved me a whole lotta trouble afterwards. But all I did now was get out my picks and go to work on his shackles, saying:

"Yes, it's me. I'm here to rescue you." He didn't have anything to say about that, so I worked on the chains — feet first, then hands — all the while hoping that the fates would give me the five milliparts or so I needed to get the 'flower loose and on his feet. After that I figured my troubles were over. All I had to do was get out of here alive, and Tiggy could go hide out at a bathhouse I knew until he could contact his kin and they could come get him.

He dropped to the floor when I got his last cuff loose and stretched all over like a cat. Damn, he was pretty. I handed him the weapon I'd taken from the guard.

"Can you use this?"

He looked at it briefly. "Yes."

"Okay. Now listen, babe. That thing's set on 'kill.' Do not shoot at the people with it. Killing people gets us in trouble. Shoot at the 'tronics. All right?"

While I was talking, I was looking out into the hall. The quiet was spooky, and there should have been more guards, but I didn't see any.

"*Dzain'domere*," said my hellflower gravely.

"Yeah, right. Just don't shoot the people."

He glared at me then and I thought for a moment he was going to shoot me, but he just nodded, so I singlefooted it out into the corridor.

The 'tronics on the tier above us started shooting.

I pulled back against the wall and wondered if I ought to use my plasma grenades now. They were small, but they were still big enough that I didn't want to risk them unless the situation got more desperate.

Six guard-bots came trundling down the corridor toward me. They were about twice the size of the guard-bot I'd fragged upstairs and were all business. I could see the riot-gas launchers extruding from the chest of the leader

as it came toward me.

Desperate enough. I rolled a grenade toward them, shoved the 'flower back in his cell, and prayed.

The grenade went off.

There was a lot of smoke, and Tiggy burned the 'tronics on the tier above us as I was finishing off the six-pack on the floor. The grenade had gone off right behind the leader, and the force of the blast had bounced back from it and totally destroyed the two behind it. The other three were confused enough — if confused is really the right word — that Tiggy was able to blow them away as we jogged past.

There were probably alarms going off in plenty, but they were all silent. At least we couldn't hear them. I overrode the lock-command on the lift from the main board like Paladin had coached me. Tiggy covered my back; his eyes were blazing like burning sapphires and he was grinning like he was enjoying himself. We picked up a couple'a rifles.

It was still dark on the Admin level. Then the elevator shut behind us and left the place *completely* dark. So far surprise was on our side. I doubted it had been ten minutes since I'd zapped the guard down there, but we had to get out now real fast before word got around.

"Let's get going," I said, mostly to reassure Paladin I was still alive.

"What's going on — are you all right?" Paladin breathed reverently in my ear. "The city's quiet. I haven't heard anything at all; they aren't calling any reserves."

"Come on," I said to both my hellflower and my partner. "This way. We're both fine for the moment. Shoot any mechanicals you see; no matter what. And, kid —"

"Don't shoot people," Tiggy finished. "I know, *chaudatu*, but I think you are a fool."

I wouldn't argue with him on that. It probably wouldn't do us any good in the event we were caught, that we hadn't killed anybody in our escape, but I was feeling just superstitious enough to think that virtue might be rewarded.

We made it out of Judgement and into Bureaucracy. A quick riot-gas grenade would cover us on our way out of Receiving and —

— I looked around and Tiggy was halfway back the corridor, stopped dead. I ran back to him.

"What the hell?" I asked him politely when I reached him. "We haven't got time to sight-see, 'flower. Shake a leg!"

I grabbed him by the wrist and yanked. Slender he might be — my fingers met around his wrist easily — but movable he was not.

"My *arthame*, *chaudatu*. I have to find it."

What?

"My Knife," Tiggy expanded. "I cannot leave without my Knife. Do you know where it is?"

"Oh for the luvva —! Look, I'll buy you a new one: come on!" I tightened my grab on his wrist and pulled — and found myself being towed in the opposite direction by a very determined alMayne who was, moreover, oblivious to threats, comments, and reasonable objections to going anywhere but out of here. Paladin was doing a nice counterpoint, telling me to let go of the klutz and run.

"All right — *all right!*" I shouted. "Look — godsdamnit, 'flower, will you slow down? Just — hold it a minnit, willya?" He stopped, and stared down coldly at me from about thirty centimeters up.

"I will listen."

"You're telling me that you're going to throw it all away, go charging back into that place and get yourself dead twice over . . . for a *knife?*"

"I will not leave without it. I can not. It is not a 'knife.' It is my —"

"Don't start. It won't make any more sense than the rest of it. Whatever it is, you're going the wrong way. Your knife'll be in Property, with the rest of your things. I'll help you get it. *Then* we leave, okay?"

"*Dzain'domere.*" Right.

Hellflowers are crazy.

We dogged it back the other way and ran into enough security-bots to reassure me that Wanderweb PortSec was still on the ball. We had to blow them away before they could use gas, or ticklers, or any of their other riot-control devices, and Real Soon Now I figured the central computer would change their programming from CONTAIN to DESTROY. I'd sort of intended to be gone before that happened, but something had come up.

Tiggy blew the doors that sealed Receiving from Bureaucracy out of their tracks and tuck-rolled through the smoking hole. I dived through after, got off a few snap-shots to discourage people, located the door I was after, tossed a riot-grenade over my shoulder, hollered "This way!" and blew the door open. Tiggy, bright lad, stopped shooting 'tronics and 'everything but people' (he *could* follow orders) and followed me.

I sort of knew where I was going. Tiggy's effex were in Dead Storage, somewhere out of the way, and I wanted to get somewhere out of the way before I ran out of grenades, blaster-charges, and luck. Damn! It had been a while since I'd been in such a pitched battle, and only the fact that it was me and a hellflower doing the utterly confusing against a maze of clerks saved our bones. Tiggy was getting frustrated at not being able to shoot the people. I could tell: he was muttering under his breath in helltongue and getting a look on his face that I did not like.

I was just about to admit I was lost when we found a likely door. Nobody'd been shooting at us for a few minutes; probably they were evacuating the organics from this section, sealing it, and calling up a shift of heavy guards from the Det-levels to finish us. Fine. I always wanted to die young and leave a pretty corpse.

The door opened, we went in, and I locked it behind us and leaned against it, panting. Definitely needed to do this more often — I was out of condition.

"Here you go, 'flower," I told him when I got my breath. "Your knife is somewhere in here."

He looked around. I looked around.

The room was toodamn big — although the size of a phone booth on up would'a been too big at this point — toodamn dark, and toodamn full of toodamn many things. It looked like every hock-shop in the Universe.

"What does this thing look like?" I asked him, looking around for the cabinet that held the weapons. Might as well help him look.

"You saw it when I held it to your throat three days ago."

Oh, fine, fine — all I'm looking for is an inert-blade sword as long as my thigh, in all of this.

Being eminently saleable, the weapons were prominently displayed. I didn't see any inert-knives, just blasters and the like. I blew the lock off the case anyway and started looking through it, helping myself to a nasty or two to ease the passing of people I might meet.

"You have just," said Paladin somberly in my ear, "set off every burglar alarm in the entire Wanderweb Justiciary."

"Great," I told the immediate world, hefting an Estel-Shadowmaker handcannon and wondering where I was going to put it. It was too pretty to leave behind, so I tucked it into my shirtfront, then added a necklace of grenades. They tangled in my comlink.

There was a wrenching sound, and I looked up to see Tiggy ripping open the locked drawers that lined the wall behind the display cases. The first one he tore open held jewelry and he threw it down with a crash.

"You really ought to get out of there," Paladin told me. "The alarm's gone out, the City Guard has been mobilized port-wide, and oh yes, quarantine has been declared. The spaceport's been closed."

"All this just for us," I murmured, and Tiggy shot me a funny look. I expect he was thinking I meant the jewelry, but it reminded me that one does *not* talk to one's beaucoup-illegal volitional logic in front of witnesses. The headprice on Paladin — and on me for "owning" him — could buy six starsystems in fee simple.

The knife *had* to be in one of the drawers because it wasn't in any of the cases. We found it in the last one (of course) and Tiggy grabbed it like a long-lost friend and tucked it into his waistband. I handed him another rifle — I'd taken the time to find one for me and to charge the powerpacs on both of them — when we both heard the ringing whine of a fusion cutter setting to work on the door to the room.

"Well, hell," I said. "That's that. You and your damn knife." I wondered if it was too late for me to emigrate someplace quiet.

Tiggy glared at me, and I noticed, almost second-hand, that he had the

'damn knife' out and pointing at me. Nothing to it, really, certainly nothing to die for: plain graysteel blade, bone handle, narrow oval guard.

"We will die nobly and with honor," he told me through clenched teeth. Any other time I might have backed down from the look in his eyes, me being a prudent lass, but right now I was toodamn mad at him, his idiot honor, and all the rest of a hellflower's bag of tricks.

"I don't *want* to die with honor! I don't want to die at all, if I can help it! And I certainly don't want to die here, with you, after you futzed up your own rescue like that, you dumb alMayne!"

"Cap'n!" Paladin shouted in my ear. The hellflower took a step toward me, knifepoint angling for my throat. "Try the air-vents — there's one in there — it should get you past the sealed section. And for sanity's sake will you stop talking to him like that? He'll *kill* you!"

"Death is the least of my worries," I muttered. "Look, 'flower, maybe we don't have to die. We can get out through the vents — if we can find one — you look skinny enough to fit."

He was still pointing that knife at me. He did not look like he was interested in escape. The door to the room was glowing cherry-red; they'd be through it in a moment.

"I saved your life," I snarled, "you should at least have the good manners to cooperate in your rescue."

That got him. I'd hoped it would. I wasn't sure I wanted him indebted to me but it was better than being dead. He put the knife away.

"All right, *chaudatu*. I will cooperate. What do you want?"

"An air-shaft, right now . . . aha!" There was one, high on the wall we were standing near. "Can you climb up that wall and get the cover off that vent?"

He looked up, nodded.

"Do it. Then get in. I'll follow you." I turned my attention to covering our retreat.

They should have been a bit more cautious. I mean, the confiscated weaponry in that room would've done credit to an Imperial armory, and a whole lot of it was catch-traps or explosives of one form or another. I stood on top of a cabinet and lobbed a half-dozen of the little grenades around my neck against the sticky-looking yellow-white metal of the melting door. They stuck, and a moment later they blew, and I followed them with a rather larger array of semi-lethal grenades tossed toward the foggy hole in the wall. Then it was up-the-wall-and-into-the-vents time again for Butterfly St. Cyr. I figured that by now my choices on Wanderweb were death or contract slavery, and they were going to object to my illegal take-off from the Port anyway, so I might as well pull out all the stops, maximize my chances, and become a legend in my own time.

"Hellflower?" I said.

"Yes, *chaudatu?*"

"You can shoot at the people now."

"Thank you, *chaudatu.*"

On the pickup in my ear, Paladin was getting as close to cursing me out as he had in his young career, telling me that Wanderweb City was going crazy trying to figure out what was going on, and, oh yes, I'd started a nice fire on that Admin level I'd just left and had I thought about how I was going to get to one of the lifts? I didn't answer that. I was wondering myself, but I figured that between the three of us, Wanderweb Free Port'd better look out. Then I concentrated on making time and distance through the vent, cursing the impulse that'd made me pick up all that hardware back there — on top of which, the vent was starting to fill up with smoke.

It was getting to look as though we'd be in here forever, when I saw a faint light that had to be coming from a grill that opened out into a room in Receiving. I couldn't get around Tiggy to see out — interesting though it would've been to try — so I tapped him on the back of the knee and asked what he saw.

"A room. A desk. Many armed men in blue livery with Wanderweb City service-marks. I count twelve, and six mechanicals like those we destroyed on the detention level. Beyond them is a lift-door."

"That's where we're going. They should be expecting to contain us down here, and not have too many guards at street-level."

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Paladin muttered. I ignored him.

"Shoot out the grill and drop these through it —" While we were talking I was trying to get the grenades I mentioned out of my vest and into his hands — no mean feat in this confined space. "Hold your breath when you do — you don't want to get a whiff of them. Shoot the 'tronics, get to the lift, and be ready to come out the other side shooting. I have a speeder parked on the street. They won't know it's mine so they shouldn't be guarding it. When we get out, we're heading for the spaceport."

"I have a shuttle there," Tiggy said, pitching his voice low so we wouldn't be heard outside.

"No go. They'll've bagged it when you were took. I have a ship there — we'll get off in that."

"News to me," said Paladin. "I thought you didn't carry live freight, Captain St. Cyr."

"This is an emergency," I commented to the world at large.

"But that shuttle was FirstLeader Starborn's property!" Tiggy protested.

"They don't care! You had it, they've got it, and will you get us out of here before I die of old age?"

"Cover your eyes."

I took a deep breath and did, and felt the back-blast a moment later as he blew the grill. Then the grenades were down, I felt him slither forward, and

I followed.

They never knew what hit them. The gas burned on my skin; I threw grenades like firecrackers after I hit, and shot 'tronics. The 'tronics shot back, and so did the organics, and I had to open my eyes to see but at least I hadn't breathed. I didn't worry about ducking because there wasn't any place to duck to. The adrenaline rush I'd been living on half the night was starting to give up and I was feeling very calm. Determined, but calm. I bumped into Tiggy and knocked him into the lift just as it opened. He shoved me behind him and blew away a couple of City Guardsmen just as the lift-doors closed. Oh well.

I mopped at my streaming eyes, pulled off a glove to do it more efficiently, and noticed my jacket was on fire. I batted out the sparks, then explored the burn. Tender, but the skin hadn't been cooked open and I knew I was luckier than I ever deserved to be.

"You all right?" I asked Tiggy.

He was staring at my arm. "You have shed blood for me," he said.

"Huh?" I said, feeling dizzy. "Don't be silly, babe, burns don't —"

Then the doors opened and we charged out full-tilt and guns blazing right over the barricade set up in front of the door. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Tiggy pick up and throw one of the 'tronics just like it was a cuddly toy, and then whip out that knife of his and slice open a Guardsman's throat while firing his rifle left-handed. It was such an amazing sight that I almost forgot to run, but I chased after him as he ran by. I whipped the last of the grenades off the string around my neck and tossed them behind me, just for luck, as we ran down the front steps.

Praise all the gods of time and chance, the speeder was just where I'd left it. I vaulted in and keyed the ignition while Tiggy climbed over the back. I took off at top speed over the curb and into on-coming traffic just as the Guardsmen came swarming down the steps. I guess they'd contained the fire we'd started, 'coz I didn't see any smoke coming out of the building as I fishtailed by.

All the traffic got out of my way, because I wasn't about to get out of its, and Paladin gave me a running breakdown of where the barricades were. We were able to go around all of them, except the one at the spaceport.

By the time we got there, the Wanderweb police'd had us misplaced for over an hour, and they weren't looking for us to be here, so we just ran right over the checkpoint, ignored them shooting at us, drove the speeder into the freight elevator that serviced the wing of the spaceport where *Firecat* was, drove into the bay, and jumped out of the speeder and into my ship. Simple.

Then we took off. The airshow I had to put on to get past their stratospheric interceptors was amusing, but Wanderweb jurisdiction only extends to the edge of the atmosphere. I outflew and outranged them and put *Firecat* into a nice high orbit, and decided I'd better count on never coming back

here again for the rest of my natural life. But I was safe, alive, and free.

Yeah, safe. I was cooped up in a ship with a crazy hellflower I'd been insulting half the night, who was probably firmly convinced he had to do something unreasonable to me as soon as he figured out what.

I'd surely have to get rid of him before I jumped to anywhere. The other reason I don't carry live freight is because *Firecat's* too small to hold anyone but me. We'd both be dead of oxygen starvation before we got anywhere. I figured I'd have to put Tiggy down somewhere on the flip side of this here planet and let him work out his own destiny.

But first I wanted . . . oh, God, I wanted a bath, a meal, to sleep for a week, clean clothes and something done about my burns and bruises. I raised the cockpit up into the main hold and crawled out. The hellflower was sitting on the deck looking at me, his cutlery tucked through the front of his waistband and his blaster in his lap. He was sweaty and grimy from the night's diversions, and his long silver hair was hanging down around his face in a tousled mop. I realized that, despite all we'd been through together, I still didn't know anything about him except that he was a highborn alMayne. I didn't even know his name. First things first. I headed for my emergency hooch-locker.

"Hey, 'flower," I said, selecting a bottle of Dondary burntwine, "what's your name?"

He stood up. "I am His Honorable *Puer Dalton-Myore zhemain-hadoa Walks-by-Night Kenor's-son Starbringer Amrath Valijon of Chernbreth-Molkath.*"

"Say *what?*" There was a pause. I was getting a bad feeling about this. "Would you mind repeating that?" He did. It came out the same way it had before: Hison Rabble Poordal Tonmior the Main Hadowalks By Night and all the rest of it. My little holcard was more than a problem. He was more than just anyold poor little rich killer.

"You're not?" I said hopefully.

"I am the Second Person of House Starborn. My father is the Delegate to the Imperium. His sister's soul-sister's son is Amrath Starborn, FirstLeader of the alMayne."

Terrific. Cousin of the alMayne king and son of its Delegate to the Court of the Twice-Born. That made Daddy the law west of the Chullite Stars, the heat, the fuzz, the galactic agent of His Imperial Majesty (god bless and keep him far away from here). In short, Tiggy was nobody and related to nobody a simple 'legger, Oob's green-eyed girl, wanted to have to do with.

"The alMayne consular ship *Pledge of Honor,*" Tiggy went on in a mildly conversational tone, "is currently orbiting Wanderweb. I am a member of the Delegate-my-father's staff. And my people are looking for me, she-Captain."

He looked at me. I looked at him. He grinned.

I had a drink. Then I had another drink. Tiggy had a drink too, and told

me I should address him as 'Sa-Honorable Puer.' I thought wicked things about his mother, but didn't say them.

Then Paladin and I went hunting the *Pledge of Honor* to fetch him home, because in addition to everything else, he was an underage Person-of-House-Starborn, shouldn't have been off his ship at all, and do you *know* what the penalty is for kidnapping a member of an Ambassadorial Delegation, anyway? They'd have fried Wanderweb to bare rock, when they found out he was dead. I wondered if I could get the Port officials to see it that way, then decided not to bother.

Although why he couldn't just have told all this to the Wanderweb Guard in the first place was beyond me. He said it was honor. I said he was crazy. He called me names in helltongue until we docked with his ship.

His family was very nice, and let me go alive. There was some talk about indenturing Tiggy to me for seven years, but I wouldn't have him, so they adopted me instead. An amusing experience, if overrated.

Two weeks later, on the way to Kiffit, Paladin told me that according to all the sociological surveys in his library, members of the alMayne aristocracy never outbreed with *chaudatu*. And he told me what *chaudatu* meant.

I didn't ask him why he hadn't told me sooner, either. I didn't want to set myself up.

I might be a hellflower now, but I wasn't crazy.



Eluki bes Shahar is 28; she has written continuity for comic books and done graphic design and illustration — most recently for a medical text. (Not having any actual medical knowledge, she wonders what the effect might be on the next generation of doctors.)

This is her first SF story sale; she promises that the next story we see from her will be very different.

We suspect she is as unstoppable as the heroine of this one.



THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

by Stephen L. Gillett, Ph.D.

FACT

You're interested in science. You've read all of Asimov's essays at least twice. You also read the articles by the local science columnist in the Sunday supplement, but you've gotten tired of them because they now seem short and superficial, and you'd like to dig a bit deeper. Or maybe you're wondering what really happened to all those Moon data, or all those Viking data. The popular press hasn't had a thing to say about them in some time, and those whispers about conspiracies to suppress information contradicting the scientific Establishment are beginning to seem a tad more credible. Or else you've heard of the pressure to "publish or perish," and you wonder where do scientists publish their findings.

Well, for all of you, there are a host of scientific publications, and they're not secret. This "literature," as it's called, consists of books, ranging from textbooks (*Evolution of Sedimentary Rocks*; *Physics of the Nucleus*) to "treatises," book-length discussions of a single subject by a specialist in the field (*The Chemistry of the Atmosphere and Ocean*; *Theory of Orbits*). There are also books consisting of articles presented at a meeting (or "symposium") on a specialized topic, the *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Lunar and Planetary Science Conference*, for example. Uncle Sam gets into the act. NASA, for example, has published thousands of "Technical Memorandums," "Special Reports," and so forth, on topics such as "Two-Center Problem Orbits as Intermediate Orbits for the Restricted Three-Body Problem."

But the heart of the literature consists of hundreds of specialized periodicals with names like the *Journal of Geology*, the *Journal of Polymer Research*, the *Astrophysical Journal*, the *Canadian Journal of Microbiology*. (If it's a technical periodical, it's nearly always a "journal" rather than a "magazine" — "journal" sounds more impressive, I guess). It's in the journals, by and large, where current scientific findings get published by active researchers.

What do journals look like? Well, they're not like the magazines you see on the newsstand. They are low-circulation and usually have little if any advertising. They're also drab; four-color spreads like those in the Sears catalog are way too expensive for most technical journals. Any illustrations are in black and white. To save money, some journals even publish "camera-ready" copy: the article isn't set in type; but a final, typewritten draft is photographed instead.

Who publishes these journals? Primarily two sorts of entities; professional organizations (the Geological Society of America, the American Animal Hospital Association, and so on), or scientific publishing houses.

Because of their low circulation, these journals are expensive to publish. Most, therefore, have a "two-tiered" subscription system. Individuals, usually members of the professional society that publishes the journals, can generally subscribe at some relatively reasonable price — say, 30 or 40 bucks a year. (Still a lot more than *Amazing*® magazine.) Organizations, however, such as companies or university libraries, must pay much higher subscription rates, ranging from hundreds of dollars to as much as one or two thousand a year. A library, by the way, is where you find technical journals if you don't happen to be subscribing to the one you need. The local university library will probably have a selection of journal titles that ranges from modest to comprehensive.

Well, now you know where the action is. Here's an entire new resource for your science reading. But hang on before you go running down to the local U. Let me finish. I want to describe how the journal articles get written, so that you'll have an idea of what you'll encounter. I also will give some signposts to guide you through the literature; otherwise, you'll get overwhelmed by the material. You won't be able to find the forest for all the trees — even for all the twigs and leaves.

First, this stuff is *not* written for the layman; in fact, much of it is not written for other scientists, either. The articles ("papers") are generally directed toward other specialists. They're compact, full of jargon, and assume a lot of background on the reader's part. The style is also ponderous; by comparison, the driver's license manual reads like a Louis L'Amour novel. The article is there for its information content, not its literary quality!

Let's look at a "typical" paper. I recently published a paper entitled "Paleomagnetism of the Late Cambrian *Crepicephalus-Aphelaspis* zone boundary in North America — Divergent poles from isochronous strata" in *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*. I'll use this paper as an example because having written it I know exactly how it came to be, and because I won't offend anybody else by using it.

First, a word-by-word translation of the title: "paleomagnetism" is the study of fossil magnetization in rocks, from which one infers the ancient position of the Earth's magnetic and geographic poles. "Late Cambrian" is the latest part of the Cambrian Era, about 500 million years ago. "*Crepicephalus*" and "*Aphelaspis*" are two genera of trilobites, extinct marine animals related to lobsters and crabs. The Cambrian Era is subdivided according to the fossil trilobites you find in the rock; if you find the same species of trilobite in two different localities, the chances are good that the rocks are the same age. Here, I've taken rock samples near a boundary where one type of trilobite dies out and another one becomes common (hence "zone boundary"); therefore, I know that the sampled strata are very nearly the same age.

Basically, in this paper I'm saying that I find different directions of fossil magnetization in rocks that, to judge by the trilobites they contain, are

nearly the same age. Now, there is just one* magnetic pole at any one time; therefore, the magnetizations can't *all* date from this restricted slice of late Cambrian time. Some magnetizations must represent a time when the rocks were remagnetized. In turn, therefore, these results indicate that we have to be careful about inferring the direction of the geomagnetic field in the Late Cambrian. The record has been written over, so to speak. And finally, this conclusion has a bearing on such things as ancient continental drift. This paper will be read in its entirety by perhaps 200 people in the world; the "abstract," a summary paragraph at the beginning of the article, will be scanned by perhaps 500 more. (I *told* you this stuff was specialized!)

And this is how Science is done. Papers like this one, which describe the results of some experiments, or part of a line of research that one is carrying out, are published in the appropriate scientific journals. Other workers then read them, and are stimulated (wow, that's neat!) or irritated (that bozo didn't take *my* work sufficiently into account!). Whatever their reaction, they are motivated to work hard, and *your* paper will influence the relevant parts of their research.

Your professional career as a scientist also gets measured largely by the papers you publish. The awarding of grants for research and the advance in professional stature depend to a large degree on your research as recorded by your papers. In theory, the quality of your papers is what should matter, not their sheer number; in fact, however, quantity is important. Visibility, salesmanship, and hype count in science as in any other human endeavor. This is where that pressure to "publish or perish" comes in. (In fairness, I should say that the pressure is not all bad. I know some scientists who never take the time to publish at all — generally, they're "tenured" professors at a university who have the seniority to escape the career pressures. If a scientist *never* publishes, his/her research will never be good to anyone else.)

How are these papers written and published? Well, you first have to do some research. You find some interesting scientific problem that seems to need investigating. But before beginning the research, you'll need to bone up on that particular area; what's been found out already? It might even turn out that the problem has already been solved, and there's no sense in reinventing the wheel, as scientists like to say.

* Actually, there are two poles, a north and south pole, which always come as a set exactly 180° apart (when you take into account the long-term behavior of the Earth's magnetic field). However, geophysicists conventionally refer to "the" pole. The plural "poles" is used only when you're speaking of several determinations or measurements (for example, "paleomagnetic poles from the Cambrian in North America"), and often it's implied that such "poles" reflect somewhat different times (including Early Cambrian as well as Late Cambrian, for example).

Boning up involves doing a "literature search," particularly if you're venturing afield from the sub-specialty that you've been working in (you should already *know* the literature there very well!). The literature search is simply bibliographic research. You spend a lot of time in the library finding out what has been done already, using various specialized indexes. (I'll describe some of these indexes in a little more detail later.) These days, you might even use a computerized database to locate references. The "grapevine," your informal personal contacts with such people as acquaintances at scientific meetings or friends from graduate school, is also an important source of what's been done. It's an even more important source about what's *being* done, the research in progress that hasn't yet been written up. The grapevine is particularly useful when you've been working in the same field for a while. For example, I am acquainted with most of the people working on paleomagnetism (my own field) in the U.S., and I know pretty much who's doing what just from conversations.

Pragmatically, funding the research is also a major worry. It's not enough to find an interesting research problem, you have to find somebody who's willing to pay to investigate it. No free lunch! Uncle Sam is the biggest source of research funding, through such agencies as NASA or the National Science Foundation (NSF), but universities and foundations also fund some research. Private industry is another important source, particularly for research that has direct, near-term applications. Funding also has its fads, depending on the changing perceptions of what's important. For example, much more money was available for research on energy sources after the oil embargo in 1973!

But let's say you got funding, carried out some research, and now you have some results to report. You prepare a manuscript on what you've done and submit it to the editor of one of the journals (choose one that's relevant; don't send a paper on particle physics to *The Journal of Cell Biology*). So far, this is like writing anything; if you'd written a science-fiction story, for example, you would send it to somebody like George here at *Amazing*®. After this point, however, the fate of a piece of freelance writing like a story is somewhat different from that of a technical paper. If you send a story to George, he will read the manuscript and either accept or reject it, depending upon whether he likes it and thinks it's appropriate for *Amazing*®. If he rejects it, he sends the manuscript back to you (at least he does if you've remembered to include the self-addressed, stamped envelope). If he accepts it, he buys it — you get paid some amount in exchange for the magazine's right to publish the piece.

This is *not* what happens with a technical article. The editor, upon receiving your manuscript, will initiate a process called "peer review"; he will send copies of the manuscript to several other scientists who are also working in the same field. They will read it over as to scientific content; they'll check your logic (is the paper well-thought out and clearly presented?);

they'll look to see if you've given proper credit to other workers ("Jones in 1958 said something very similar to what you're saying here; you should cite him"). They'll also criticize your English, but since by tradition scientific writing is written in an extremely dry, pedantic style, few scientific papers become literary gems.

The reviewers may be anonymous, or they may not be. It depends on their wishes and on the policy of the journal. There are advantages either way; anonymity protects you from possibly insulting a Very Important Senior Scientist, with possible damage to your career. On the other hand you're extra-scrupulously honest when you sign your name to a review.

Anyway, at some point the reviewers will finish their hatcheting and return their comments. (By the way, because of peer review, you submit *several* copies of your manuscript to the editor of the journal. This is also different from freelance writing.) Based on the reviewers' comments, the editor will make one of several decisions. First, he may accept the paper as is. This, however, is rare; nothing is perfect; scientific fields are too big for any single human being to be aware of all that's happening. Besides, it often happens that the reviewers find your deathless prose to be unclear and confusing. So more likely, the reviewers will have picked up flaws (hopefully just minor flaws) in your exposition or your logic that will have to be fixed. Thus, more commonly the editor will accept the paper for publication "subject to revision": that is, you're expected to make modifications in accordance with the reviewers' suggestions. At the least, you must do a better job of presenting your point of view. Or finally, if the reviews are really scathing, your paper will be rejected, usually with a polite suggestion that "you may wish to consider submission elsewhere."

Peer review is what keeps scientists — and science — honest. Scientists are human, in both the positive and negative senses; they laugh and love as much as anybody, but they also can be motivated by emotion or personal prejudice. Sure, in a review somebody can reject an idea out of hand because it conflicts with the reviewer's deeply held prejudices. Or someone else can categorically reject all evidence against *his* (or *her*) pet idea. However, prejudices tend to cancel in a large enough population: for every issue that you have a deep emotional stand on, there are 100 or 1000 that you have no stake in, and that therefore you can be objective about. (To take a hypothetical example, I don't care if Professor M at Random State U. is positively convinced that the Earth's primitive atmosphere contained ammonia, while Professor N at the University of Erewhon is as irrationally sure that it contained sulfur dioxide. I have no vested interest in either idea, so I can evaluate the evidence reasonably objectively.)

Also, if your paper is rejected, there's appeal! You can always resubmit the paper (after *some* revision — the reviewers always have some valid comments) with a letter that explains why you think the reviewers' criticisms were overstated, and request that the paper be considered again. I've done

this myself. (Dumb reviewers!) And the resubmission might even be accepted. (Mine was.)

But scientific publication, indeed science itself, is a rough-and-tumble. If you can't stand to see your precious ideas get critiqued, revised, or even rejected completely; if you can't accommodate to other people's ideas (people who will be as bright, and commonly as egotistical as you); if you go beyond attacking ideas to attacking other people ("Your feeble intellect is obviously incapable of comprehending this revolutionary advance"); well, not only will your ego will be severely bruised, but you don't understand science. Outsiders often get a view of science as something advancing with the ponderous inevitability of an aircraft carrier. In fact, controversy is the stuff of science. For those of you with a philosophical bent, the Hegelian cycle of thesis, antithesis, synthesis encourages rapid progress.

(To help my own objectivity, when I receive the reviews on a manuscript, I read them through once and then set them and the manuscript aside for a few weeks. After this cooling-off period, I can write a better revision. I've mellowed out and digested the reviewers' comments.)

Well, after being rewritten, let's say your revised paper has now been accepted for publication in the journal. Now they'll write you a check for first serial rights for the privilege of publishing the paper, as would happen if you sold a story to *Amazing*®? Uh . . . no. That's not the way it works at all. At best, they'll publish the paper for free; that is, without charging you. Most journals, however, request that you honor "page charges"; that is, you're charged a certain amount (generally in the range of \$100/published page) to publish the paper. Scientific publication is expensive, because of the low circulation and peer review; it's not a money-making business. No free lunch, remember? Generally, if your research is supported by a grant, page charges are budgeted in the grant. But if you're really destitute — say you're a graduate student without a grant — the page charges will be waived. (In fairness, the journals emphasize that they decide whether to accept a manuscript *before* they ask you if you can cover page charges.) I've published several papers without paying page charges; they were part of my dissertation and I had no formal funding support. But the journal makes you feel guilty about not doing your part to support them!

That's how scientists publish their findings. And — oh yes! — I did promise to give some guidelines if you're interested in getting the word straight from the horse's mouth. Rather than leap right into the specialized papers, you need to pick and choose. For starters, hie yourself down to the local university library and get a textbook for an overview of the field you're interested in. Be sure to get one with a glossary.

When you know the lingo a bit, look for a treatise or advanced text on the subject. To find such things, besides the tried-and-true indexes like the card catalog (you *do* know how to use the card catalog, right?), most fields have a specialized indexing service covering them in detail — not just books, but

also the articles in journals. These indexes are sort of like an expanded *Reader's Guide*. My own field, for example, is covered by the *Bibliography and Index of Geology*. Some fields have really fancy indexes that include short abstracts; the indexing service pays some poor soul to summarize the papers. The monumental *Chemical Abstracts* is perhaps the most impressive example.

At this point, if you really want to be *au courant*, you can go to the journals. But be selective; look for "review papers." A review paper is a summary of a field written by a scientist who is a specialist in the subject. Unlike a typical journal article, a review paper gives an overview of a subject, as well as a critical guide to the primary articles the review is based on. For example, I'm working on a review paper called "A Review of Paleozoic Paleomagnetism in North America". This is my analysis and summary of the current state-of-the-art in the studies of fossil magnetism of Paleozoic age (from about 600 to 250 million years ago) from rocks in North America. The paper will be reviewed by some of my colleagues, but the published paper will not only be read by specialists, it will also be read by other scientists who want to get up on the field. And because my paper is appearing in a reviewed professional journal, s/he will have some assurance that I'm not completely off the wall.

Entire journals are devoted to review papers only — they have names like *Reviews of Geophysics and Space Physics*, or *Physical Review Letters*, or *Space Science Reviews*, or *Annual Review of Biochemistry* — and those are good places to start looking for the subject you're interested in. Occasionally review articles also appear in other technical journals. For example, *Science* and *Nature*, two prestigious journals that publish a wide spectrum of papers, have a couple of reviews on subjects of broad scientific interest in every issue. To recognize such papers, look for "review" in the title. They also tend to be longer than most papers, and to have voluminous references.

Finally, entire issues of journals are sometimes devoted to specialized subjects, and the subject is often one that is very interesting to the SF community. For example, the *Journal of Geophysical Research* has run special issues on the Viking results and the Pioneer Venus results in the last several years. Oftentimes such special issues will include a review paper that summarizes the mission. *Icarus*, the "Journal of Solar System Studies," which specializes in papers on planetary science, recently ran a special issue on Venus. And very often, these papers include nice pictures that didn't make it into the popular press! To find such special issues, you just have to look through the journals. Generally, each publication has a yearly index in the December issue, which makes searches go faster.

So next time some SF acquaintance tells you excitedly about some new discovery that she just read about in the papers, you can yawn and say, "Oh, yeah, I saw that six months ago in *Review of Geophysics and Space Physics*."

UPON THIS SHOAL OF TIME

by Lillian Stewart Carl

art: Jack Gaughan

The author lives in the suburban wilderness of Dallas, "working primarily as a domestic engineer" for her husband and two small sons. She has been a librarian, an engineering aide, a newspaper columnist, and a college history teacher. She has sold an essay to Smithsonian and a handful of SF stories; we look to the success of further work, including two completed novels.

The foreman scrambled out of the trench, brushed away a couple of volunteers, and called, "Dr. Henderson! Here's the skull, just as the scanners indicated!"

James Henderson quickly returned the stone axe he'd been inspecting to its box and started across the field. So it *was* there, unlikely as it seemed; not electronic backscatter but human bone. And yet recumbent stone circles always contained cremated burials, a few flakes of carbon at the most; this one, Castle Fay, had seemed no different from Sunhoney or Berrybrae or Balquhain.

So he had the skull now. His lips moved: "— that but this blow/ Might be the be-all and the end-all here,/ But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,/ We'd jump the life to come."

"I beg your pardon?" A figure appeared at his side, a young woman clutching a tiny recorder. Lisa what's-her-name, Morrow or Morgan, the reporter from *World*.

"Macbeth," he replied, embarrassed. "Lived right over there, at Cawdor. Just an apt quotation."

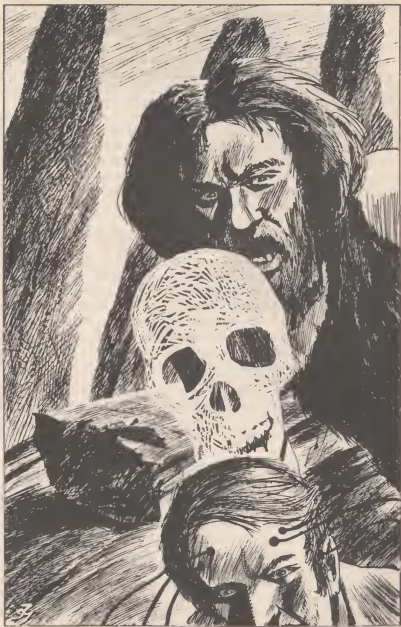
"Regarding that experiment with the skull?"

Henderson sighed. He was used to this by now, trying to excavate and preserve and record and interpret — and make it all seem like headlines in the afternoon tabloids. No, that wasn't fair. The editors of *World*, reasonably, wanted their readers to get something interesting from their investment in the expedition.

"Yes. An attempt to jump to another life."

She nodded, scrambling up the hill at his heels.

Expedition, he thought. It sounded like a trek up the Nile rather than a pleasant drive across northeast Scotland. And there would be no treasure of Tut-Ankh-Amon at the end, no spectacular discovery to assure future financing. This was only a small Neolithic site. Henderson remembered with exasperation the student volunteer who, thinking that "pottery" was his mother's delftware tea service, was caught throwing away some very



nice corded beaker fragments.

"This experiment now," the young woman persisted, slightly out of breath. The stubble of the harvested field crunched and splintered under their feet. Her recorder whirled.

"Later," he said. A chance, that, telling her about his theory. At best he could be accused of sensationalism, at worst farce. But it might be the answer to an archaeologist's lifelong dream, better than any store of gold; it was worth the chance. Perhaps this was a major expedition after all —

Lisa paused to tuck a straying curl up under her scarf. She'd been good-natured about the unusual late-spring heat, in the eighties almost every afternoon, the site capped with a turgid sky and the air like syrup, like the calm before a storm. "Hard, isn't it," she asked, "to interest people in a minor site when the Mars expedition is about to land?"

He glanced sharply at her. She smiled encouragement, her face glowing with perspiration. "Yes," he said. "Quite." And suddenly he liked her.

The stones were an upthrust island in the sloping field. They were rough-hewn, scored from centuries of frost, shading from grey to white to the splotched brown of lichen and moss. The elongated stones were ranked in height; the tallest, flanking the megalith of the recumbent, were almost as tall as a man. The recumbent itself was a huge gneiss boulder lying across the southwest arc of the circle. Its top had been smoothed and marked irregularly with the small round depressions known as cupmarks.

Henderson dodged around the recumbent and his fingers reached automatically to touch a cupmark. It was an invocation, perhaps; he'd never stopped to analyze it. He jerked his hand back, hoping that Lisa hadn't noticed. She had, and her fingers were already brushing the stone.

The trench cut across the pile of rocks that had once been a ring-cairn centering the circle. Its perpendicular sides revealed a suggestive pattern of quartz crystals disturbing the red clay and bits of charcoal left by the usual conflagration. A stain in the soil at the bottom was no doubt organic.

Henderson crouched there, careful of where he put his feet, his hips, his elbows — the experience of twenty years become instinct. He extended his hand. The foreman placed a brush in it. Delicately, he touched a fiber of the brush to the brown lump just emerging from the soil. A skull indeed; the front incisors were still imbedded in the jaw. He reached out again, receiving a dentist's pick. A crumble of dirt fell past his shoulder onto the indistinct arch of the skull and he ordered, without looking up, "Stay away from the edge of the trench!"

"I'm sorry," said Lisa. The hum of her recorder was piercingly loud. "Age?" she asked. "Sex?"

"No and no," he responded, not really listening. He pried off a flake of dirt, then another. The line of teeth extended downwards into their earth

matrix; the mandible seemed to be missing . . . no, it had dropped, and the mouth was filled with dirt. He brushed dust from the orbits of the eyes; and the sockets gazed blindly, incuriously back at him. The left temporal lobe was somewhat misshapen, pressed by the weight of the soil.

"Intact," he announced after a time. "Get out the box. We're going to lift it whole and take it back to the laboratory; it might rain. Plaster, latex — and call the photographer!" The team scattered.

Henderson sat back on his heels. A man, he thought, judging by the thickness of the supra-orbital ridges, even though the mastoid processes were still buried. And the skull was rather longer than wide — beaker culture perhaps, or later. But still it was an anomaly. And as yet it was silent, shrouded in time.

"An intrusive burial?" Lisa suggested.

The woman could read his mind. "Perhaps. These sites were evidently in use for centuries, by different groups of people —" He touched a small piece of stone protruding from the dirt beside the skull and it came loose in his hand; it was a flattened semicircle of greenstone that glimmered in the filtered light. "Wrist guard for an archer," he said to himself. "Rather small."

The recorder whirled and then stopped. The foreman appeared at the edge of the trench and began handing down the protective material. The sun edged further into the west, slipping below the billowing mass of a thunderhead, and a shaft of reddish-gold light struck the circle. The cupmarks whirled with quick bursts of luminescence and the splotched stones glowed.

The laboratory was dim; even in northern Scotland in the summer the sun had to set eventually. The ranks of display shelves and drawers were all cleanly shut and labeled; the scanners were silent. Faint glimmers of phosphorescence were computer screens. Lisa Morgen looked as warily at the technological artifacts as if she were gazing around an alchemist's chamber.

"Eye of newt?" Henderson suggested. He settled down in the chair behind his desk, more relaxed now that the excavation was over, the volunteers dismissed, the paperwork begun. The skull had been safely removed, encased in a protective "mushroom" of latex and plaster and dirt; it sat now on a cleared table next to the vacuum analysis chamber. He avoided looking at it, shy somehow, knowing what he was going to do to it. What was the penalty for a violation of time? . . .

Lisa perched on another chair. "I would say that this place looks like Mars Central — I was *World's* reporter for the launch a couple of years ago. Fascinating, if somehow intimidating. Archaeology has come a long way from Belzoni and his Egyptian grave robbers."

She'd done her homework; he'd come to expect that of her. "But our

goals are similar," he said. "We're more problem-oriented than artifact-oriented now, of course. We're aiming at a general theory offering insight into the dynamics of human history."

"Making the dry bones of the past speak to us?" she asked.

Henderson did not glance over his shoulder. The skin on the back of his neck tightened. "Yes —"

Lisa's voice filled the sudden silence. "There's the unified field theory of physics, of course; I'd say that your general theory of human dynamics is something less quantifiable."

"In many ways, yes. And yet —" It was time. He sat up straighter and placed his hands on the desk before him, reassured, somehow, that they were flesh and blood. At his fingertips was a small cardboard box and several quartz crystals.

The recorder came to life with an inquiring *chirrup?* as Lisa leaned forward.

"Dating," Henderson began, in his best lecture-hall voice. "Always a problem. The potassium-argon technique, using rocks of volcanic origin, is useful for the really old deposits — Johanson and White and their three- or four-million-year-old hominids in East Africa, for example. That could well be where the exciting archaeology is going on."

He cleared his throat. She said nothing, but her nod was understanding.

"Amino-acid dating," he went on, "is useful for more recent dates, though the samples can be unreliable in areas of temperature fluctuation. The classic method, of course, is radiocarbon dating; the new method using a particle accelerator can provide quite accurate results."

"Haven't charcoal samples from some of the recumbents been dated to about 2500 B.C.?" Lisa asked. "So our friend over there would be younger —"

"Evidently," Henderson opened the box. The wristlet nestled on its bed of cotton, neatly tagged with date and location. It was smooth, cool to the touch. The quartz crystals held hidden prisms beneath their milky surfaces. "We can use fission-track dating, thermoluminescence, trace-element analysis to determine fluorine, uranium, and nitrogen levels in bone —"

"Jim," Lisa broke in, "these are all dating systems. I had the impression you were talking about something more."

"Yes. Quite. More than just dating. I believe we can use the new technology, computers and ultra-sensitive scanners, to actually reach into the past."

"As we use them to reach out to the future," Lisa murmured. It was a statement, not a question.

"Time does not exist at the sub-atomic level."

"So I hear — but I can't say I understand. Time is an ordered sequence."

"Time is relative. And I mean to prove it." Henderson rose to his feet and walked away down the length of the room. The one small lamp over his desk left only a circle of light at the end of the room but he moved with assurance into the dark, past the strata of equipment installed over the years and lovingly maintained; the layers of artifacts were an ancient *tell*, bone and stone and pottery stored away in lieu of living memories — His life compartmented into excavation reports, filed away in tidily labeled specimen boxes.

He stopped by the "mushroom" that contained the skull, a large box enclosing the entire plot of ground in which it had been found. He opened the top and reached up to switch on a fluorescent lamp. The sudden wash of greenish-purple light made the skull start from the earth matrix, the bone dull, pale. Henderson reached for his brush and pick and scraped away yet more flakes of dirt. This task alone would take several days.

The vacant eyes were opaque, the nasal aperture as sharp as the beak of a hunting bird. And yes, the mouth was indeed gaping open; the mandible had dropped and the head had been buried with the jaws apart. Dirt filled the mouth and the teeth seemed to grind it between them. The skull was screaming, the tabloids would say.

Lisa spoke from behind his shoulder; he jumped. "Who was he? Are you going to find out?"

"It's an experiment," Henderson cautioned. He firmly turned his back on the box. "Trace-element analysis works on the principle of neutron activation. We can analyze traces of chemicals, their radioactive decay — a simple process now, as our tools become more and more sensitive.

"And I've been working on a similar process: the analysis of minute traces of electrical activity, of magnetic fields created in the body. The brain is basically a computer, you know; our astronauts are even now using protein chips in their shipboard computers that are directly linked to their own minds. The brain uses electrochemical messages, creating magnetic flows — and I believe that some of those messages would remain in the bone of the skull."

Lisa's wide blue eyes were fixed on his face, unblinking. She was, he sensed, struggling with curiosity and scepticism mingled. "Like the — the people who take an old Roman tile and go into a trance over it and then wander off into the desert and find the building the tile came from?"

"Psycho-metrics? Hardly. This is hard science. After I refine the technique any other scientist will be able to independently repeat my results."

"And if it doesn't work?"

"If it doesn't work?" He shrugged ruefully. "Then I forget it and try something else." Maybe I'll give up, he thought, but he tried to smile instead.

She thought a moment, her brow furrowed. "Tell me something, Jim."

"Certainly."

"Are you just showboating, or do you really think this — electrochemical trace analysis — can be as valid a tool as radiocarbon dating?"

He took a deep breath, trying to calm the pounding of his heart. "Showboating? In a way, yes. *World* has been very generous. So has the university. There are other foundations who could be generous, if they could see results. A valid technique to achieve what archaeologists over the centuries would have sold their souls to do, to travel in time —"

Her eyes stopped him; one corner of her mouth crimped in what might have been a smile. "And the reputation of Dr. James Henderson? Have you sold your soul to it? Are you afraid that when the Mars data starts coming in no one's going to care about a specialist in old rocks —"

"More than rocks. You know that."

She stopped, and her brows tilted. "Yes, I know that. If it weren't for the dynamics of human change here on Earth there wouldn't be a ship nearing Mars." But her mouth was still crimped. Perhaps she was weighing his sanity. Perhaps she was amused at his presumption.

He returned her look. "Time is a dimension," he asserted. "One through which we can move as easily as we move through space."

And Lisa's mouth spread into a smile. "I believe you. So help me, I really do." She flicked off the recorder and it protested with a hiccup.

He turned back to the skull, lifted his pick. His knees were weak. "Thank you," he said.

"And how do you quantify your data — the traces of brain activity you pick up?"

"The same way human beings have been quantifying incoming data since the days of Johanson's Lucy. By plugging it into the computer that is the human brain."

"Oh. But then —"

"There'll be a printout, of course, that I can submit to *World* and the university and the academic journals. Graphs and intriguing squiggly lines. And a recording, of course, of what I sense in my own mind when I link it with the analyzer."

The pause was longer this time. "Oh. That's where I come in. The independent observer."

"If you wish. You want a story and I'm giving you one." He didn't look at her. He took another deep breath and tapped absently on the skull with his pick. A shred of bone peeled away and slipped down over the zygomatic arch, landing inside the open mouth. "Damn," he muttered. Pay attention —

She put her hand on his arm and he started. "Hardly independent," she told him. "But I'd like to help. I'm becoming very interested in this."

Henderson reached for tweezers, retrieved the sliver of bone, replaced it. When he turned she was still watching him. "Thank you again," he

said, and this time he managed to complete his smile.

Henderson worked on cleaning the skull during the days, and in the evenings he drove with Lisa out to Castle Fay to supervise the final mopping-up operations. The trench was backfilled, the fragments of equipment packed up, the circle restored to its solitude. Typical late Neolithic site — except for the skull.

Midsummer approached, green-gold sunlight crystallized over the Grampians. Reports came over the car radio from the Mars expedition: a few Terran day-cycles, and the astronauts would land. "We are the Martians," Henderson muttered to himself. "We leap to the future." Beside him Lisa nodded.

He took her to the circles at Balquhain and Loanhead, and they stopped at a public house in Inverurie where she bought the whiskey. Later, suffering from Glenlivet and exhilaration, he pulled into a lay-by on the outskirts of Aberdeen and kissed her. Acting like an old fool, he told himself even as he did it; he was reaching for something he'd long ago decided didn't matter.

Only in that decision, she told him, had he ever been a fool.

"Hardly a romantic place, the laboratory," Henderson said.

Lisa leaned over to plant a kiss on the top of his head. "It rather depends on your definition of romantic, doesn't it?" Her voice was studiously light and teasing, but her hands were shaking.

"Uh, well, whatever —"

She placed the last electronic dot on his temple and stood back, checking the leads. He was sweating, threatening to loosen the mild adhesive. His blood pounded in his brain. For the first time he was frightened, not of failing in his experiment, but of succeeding.

The skull, cleaned and reinforced, waited in the analysis chamber, mouth open, eyes empty, an object not of fear but of awe. Henderson leaned back in the chair, arranging himself so he could see it. "All right?" Lisa asked.

"Yes," he said. A small headline in an academic journal, Dr. James Henderson dies of heart attack before experiment — He tried a few deep breaths.

Lisa's footsteps faded away down the length of the room, paused, returned. Her slender arm and hand appeared before his eyes. She wore the greenstone wristlet. "For luck," she murmured. It was small even for her.

The skull waited. The recorder hummed. "Ready," Henderson said, and he reached out to key the appropriate commands.

The CRTs flushed green and the printers started up with sudden coughs and clacks. The skull shimmered in the brilliant light of its

chamber, friable golden bone fading to only a suggestion of humanity.

Henderson's damp skin stung where the electrodes rested; electricity, he told himself, normal power poles — His vision sparked and cleared; his head swam. Electricity, too much — His world line wobbled, space-time pulsing in his mind.

He sensed Lisa with the corner of his eye, sitting forward tensely, her hands clasped, her eyes great shadowed pools. Her image flickered, swirled away into light impulses, re-formed. The wristlet shone in the radiance from the analysis chamber. Behind her, on the desk, the quartz crystals flickered in quick bursts of color.

A ripple of consciousness, neurons firing in succession; senses shivering, extended into infinity — Nausea, as if he plunged down a long slope. Waves rhythmic through his head and sea birds crying. Ships, wooden cockleshells, swooping over the horizon. Caught between sea and forest, beneath a turgid sky.

The sky heaved, fractured, broke into particles of light shaped in human form — gnarled tree roots were fingers dripping dark dirt, blood — faces peered through the leaves, mouths open, screaming —

He was screaming. He was sitting upright in his chair crying out in fear. Convulsively he ripped the electrodes from his head. And Lisa was there, shutting down the equipment, reaching for him, eyes brimming with fear. "What, what is it? . . ."

The skull solidified into thin brown bone. The crystals dulled.

Henderson shook, teeth chattering. The great forest hemmed him in, spirits moving behind the branches, whispering. Wind tossed the leaves in a murmur of thunder. Voices, voices on the wind, in the sky —

The sun glinted on sharp blades, blood stained the rivers, and still the voices screamed, fear, grief, and the talons of despair.

He leaped to his feet, his hands clenched at his sides, shivering. The laboratory, enclosed space, twentieth-century metal and plastic and glass. Henderson, James Henderson — There were his meters, dials steady. There were his scanners, screens flickering, waiting. There was his printout stacked in its basket.

"Jim?" Lisa's voice leaped upwards into a register of alarm.

"All right, all right," he muttered. He washed his face in the sink in the corner, brushing aside a mound of damp pottery shards. His mouth tasted of — blackberries and honey and a faint tang of game. With abrupt gestures he poured himself a cup of coffee from the urn in the corner. The black liquid splashed over his hand, burning it. The milk was sour.

Slowly he stopped trembling. The shadows in the corners were just shadows, concealing — nothing. "The question," he said, mouthing the English words as if he'd never spoken them before, "the question is whether anyone would want to repeat this experiment." He sat back down in the chair, dropped his head into his hands, and wept.

Her arms went around him; the wristlet was cool against his face.

The white stone avenues of Aberdeen slipped into darkness behind them. The headlights of the car tore neat crescents of light from the darkness ahead. The rent fabric of space-time streamed in tatters across the night.

Lisa drove. Henderson sat slumped in the seat beside her, half-waking, half-dreaming. "I should have known," he said in lucid moment, "that it wouldn't be like sitting in the cinema. The brain's impulses are emotions —"

"And once those impulses are recorded in the brain," Lisa said, flat, "they become a part of it."

Henderson cackled in an insane laughter. "If a future archaeologist analyzed my skull, he'd find the traces of my life overlaid with the traces of the old Celt, the old seer —" The landscape whirled away, streets diminished to tracks, trees sprouted, stars stood hard and bright in an indigo sky.

The great Celtic shield lay heavy on his arm; the sword gleamed in his hand. His muscles knew the heft of the weapons, his throat the thrill of the war-paeon. The strangers had come over the water carrying their gods, their golden eagles, on poles before them; he fought, screaming, until his muscles were quivering strands of pain. His people crossed that filament of time from life into death, became tumbled bloody shapes at his feet, no longer his friends, his family — They left him alone, grief clotting his throat, teeth set tight in a dull anger that was closer to fear than he would admit.

Henderson writhed upwards, staring over the dashboard with eyes and mouth distended — Lisa cast a glance towards him and set her teeth deep into her lower lip.

The sky was mute, the winds still, the gods hid their faces. Cursing them, he fled. Northwards, and even the oaks were lost to oddly-shaped pine and birch. The sun and the moon hovered on the horizon, slow to sleep. A strange land, appropriate for a warrior who had cheated death — the bright eagles followed, and he stood, calling for an end to time and pain.

He fought and fell, maimed, into the bracken. The earth embraced him, warm dirt against his nostrils, concealing him from the enemy. He crawled away, reluctantly living still, sustained by some stubborn will —

The stones were sun-warmed and silent, the cradle of the sky. Ancient meeting-place, resonant with echoes, beckoning with a peace beyond death. He lay against the recumbent, letting his soul bleed into the sky.

And a woman's face bent over him, a cool greenstone wristlet drew the fever from him, small hands summoned him back into time. Her dark eyes held something of the night, some memory of abandoned gods that stirred even his despair. So he lived. He was no longer a warrior, and his weakness gnawed him, but her bow brought down game, and her tribe, he discovered, hungered

more for his songs than for meat. In the songs his people lived again.

Lisa missed the turn on the narrow lane to Castle Fay, stopped, backed up, started again. The countryside was covered with a pall of black velvet, the heavens concealed behind the clouds. A thin mist of rain shrouded the windshield.

Her eyes were dark, Henderson thought, flickering with firelight. No — He shook himself, groped for familiar space-time. Her eyes were blue in the car lights, narrowed with concern. She was small and dark, her hair a corona of shadow —

His face stung under the woad with which her people painted it; surreptitiously he washed it off. Only in her arms did he belong. A change of seasons, raindrops cool against warm flesh — Then she bore his child, and she died of it. He scratched at the ground like a wild animal, whimpering, the ashes of her pyre caked black under his fingernails. Tired, tired of the pain of it, and still he lived.

No one could tell him the secret of the stones — they were there, part of the land. But he was drawn to them; he knew. He crouched in the circle of time, aching, too weary to pray, too weary to curse. And the silence of the stones drained his pain. The stars turned; the sun and moon cycled in their courses, slow to sleep; the stones remained. When a star flared and fell from its place he watched, no longer frightened — the sky alone remained constant —

Her wristlet hung in a pouch around his neck, warm against his chest. Their son's eyes were dark and eager, nourished by Celtic myth; the boy grew into a Pict, but he prayed to Danu, and he heard Cernunnos hunting in the forest.

The car stopped. The lights died. The roar of the engine faded. Lisa turned in the seat and looked at him cautiously. "Here we are."

"I might," Henderson stated, "learn in time to control it. Like repressing the subconscious or quelling a memory."

The stubbled field was treacherous at night. Lisa's torch wavered unsteadily and they stumbled together. At last they came to the stones. An upwelling of power, Henderson thought. A stone cathedral, molded by time. He touched one of the flanking boulders and the damp rock sparked against his flesh. The trees shook the raindrops from their leaves. The ring-cairn shifted in the darkness, shaking pebbles from its slope.

"I have to keep him," Henderson said. "But I respect him, as you did; and he can sing his songs again, to yet another race —"

Lisa pressed against him with a slight shiver and he put his arm around her. "An intrusive burial, right?" she asked.

"Yes. The stones were old, old, and the race that had raised them gone. But he remembered. Perhaps he saw the greatest megalith of them all still standing in Brittany. Perhaps he saw Avebury when it was whole." He paused, closed his eyes. The stones crouched in his mind, aged and slow to move. "I saw —"

He was a seer, the old Celt; tribesmen came from all the surrounding

territories, and for offerings of food and cloth and small wood carvings he would speak, dreams of the past, the future — The years drifted away, the stars circled in their patterns. When he died he was no longer alone.

"Why did they bury just his head?" Lisa asked. Her voice quavered, rising again, the thin shell of her calmness cracking.

"He was a Celt. The Celts thought that the head was the seat of the soul."

She shivered. She laid her face against his chest and clasped his shirt in her hands. "You've sold your soul, haven't you?" Her words, a high-pitched shriek, whirled away down the wind.

Ghost-trees murmured down the slope. Lightning flickered sullenly in the east, the god Taranis hammering out his bronze sword. "I think," Henderson whispered, "I think perhaps I have."

He worked on his paper, skirting the boundary between the obligatory scientific obfuscations and the need for cold clarity. He sorted the readouts and attempted to interpret them. At times he felt the old imperative — publish or perish — and the irony of his situation came home to him. He had achieved his life-long dream, true. But even if the scientific community believed him, few would be the foolhardy souls daring to repeat his results.

And yet, at times, Henderson's dry academic self was less real than the emotions of two millennia past. He gazed at the skull as it sat in state in his laboratory, bemused by its memories, by the intensity of the old Celt's life, and he struggled for what the twentieth-century world would call sanity. The streets of Aberdeen were specters rising from primeval forests; gods burnished the summer sky.

But Lisa stayed, filed a story filled with supposition and asked for leave —

"I'm learning," he told her. "It's rather like coping with my own recollections, an image here, an image there. I'll sort it out eventually, which of it is me and which — no, it's all me now." He leaned back against the seat of the car and watched her drive. Today she was reassuringly fair-haired; the Pictish woman, memory within memory, receded to a dream. "I'm the first time-traveller, and someday I'll be able to share it with the world."

"And with *World*," she reminded him. But her smile was much more relaxed than it had been. The midnight picnic, in honor of the night's event, had been her idea. "Darwin, you know," she continued, "put off publishing *The Descent of Man* for many years, until he was quite old. Your day will come."

"Are you equating my discovery with Darwin's?"

She glanced over at him. "Yes."

"Thank you." And a moment later he chuckled. "I can see it now."

Archaeologists have finally overcome the label of grave robbers, only to have my technique send them back to robbing graves. The mummy of Sekenenre in the Cairo Museum, the arsenic-soaked skull of Napoleon, Edward the Confessor —”

“Jesus Christ?” offered Lisa, with a wicked grin.

“His bones,” Henderson said regretfully, “were resurrected.”

Few cars were on the road. The night was clear, the moon a cauldron of light on the horizon, wisps of cloud like grace notes against the stars. The stone circle glistened in its hillside island. Henderson regarded it sternly, refining the megaliths into the weathered shapes he had recorded in his preliminary survey. The effort was no longer a wrenching spasm; it had become a delicate sculpting of the fabric of space-time.

They left offerings of breadcrumbs in the cupmarks, spread their blanket between the recumbent and the cairn, set the radio close by. “The ancients,” Henderson murmured into Lisa’s hair, “believed that a child conceived on the grave of a hero would inherit the hero’s courage.” The tribespeople shifted outside the circle, pleased by the ceremony within, gentle ghosts — He carefully drew the curtain of the present across their faces.

Lisa lay close beside him, still. “And was he a hero?”

“Perhaps living takes the greatest courage. Living on your particular shoal and watching time recede inexorably over its event horizon.”

She considered that. “And you sold your soul to pluck time from its stream. For your reputation and the theory of human dynamics?”

“For the future, perhaps. For the survival of human consciousness —” But he couldn’t quite focus on what had once been the ambitions of Dr. James Henderson.

“Knowledge,” Lisa sighed. “Both fruit and penalty.”

The voices on the radio spoke of wind conditions, landing speeds — the red skies of Mars. I, too, could amaze the world, Henderson thought, but it was without bitterness.

The moon was held between the flankers, centered on the recumbent, caught between heaven and Earth. A scattering of quartz crystals glinted like lunar teardrops. The stones reached upwards into the night, the fingers of man touching the sky. We exist, they whispered; we exist, and we hold up the heavens. Time itself is molded by our hands, the dimensions of the universe defined by our dreams.

The distant red star that was Mars hung suspended just over the tallest stone. Henderson shifted, only a little, to turn up the radio. “— Chryse Base here. Successful touchdown. Mars Central copy —”

The stars swung in their courses, the sky secured. He lay back, content in the past and future mingled, and Lisa laid her head on his chest. The slow rhythm of his heartbeat pervaded the night.

The memories of Earth rested quietly among the stones, waiting. ☾

IMPROBABLE BESTIARY: The Faun

*Meeting the dawn
With a light burst of lyrical
Greeting, the Faun
Plays his reed-pipes and then
Ponders the worth
Of his midsummer miracle,
Wanders the Earth,
Seeking maidens and men.*

The miller, the tanner, the goose-girl, the cook
Hear music, far music, seductive and sly.
The ploughman hears laughter and hurries to look:
The Goat-Footed Piper comes wandering by.
The nurse drops her basin, the cleric his book,
The milkmaid her churn and the shepherd his crook,
And each is enchanted, and all of them drawn
By the magical pipes of the musical Faun
And they follow the music,
 The beckoning music,
They follow the Faun and his music and then
They dance to the piper,
 The Goat-Footed Piper,
They dance, as the piper comes up through the glen.

*Lightly, the breeze
Joins the melody, beckoning
Slightly . . . the trees
Seem to whisper the tune;
Spanning the days
To a time beyond reckoning,
Fanning the blaze
Of a midsummer noon . . .*

And somewhere, oh somewhere, far-distant, away,
The Faun plays his reed-pipes and winks to the sky
And Time waits suspended in midsummer day
Where love never withers and dreams never die.
Some dawn, in my garden, the reed-pipes will play;
The laugh of the piper will lead me astray
To join all the others who dance on my lawn
And I'll follow, with them, to the Land of the Faun.
And I'll follow the music,

 The faraway music,
We'll follow the Faun and his music and then
I'll dance to the piper,
 The Goat-Footed Piper,
We'll dance, as the piper comes up through the glen.

— F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

IMPROBABLE BESTIARY: The Ogre

Early one morning, without any warning,
While both of his parents lay dreaming
Young Johnny fell out
Of his bed with a shout
And he ran down the corridor screaming.

“An Ogre is under my bed!” Johnny cried,
When his parents both asked what was wrong.
“An Ogre with big hairy fingers *this* wide,
And his sharp pointy teeth are *this* long!
His skin is all green, and he looks really mean,
And he grinned and he laughed and made all kinds of noise
And he said: *‘I’m an Ogre! I KILL LITTLE BOYS!’*
He’s under my bed!

Take a look!” Johnny said,
And his five-year-old face had turned white.
“He said: *‘I’ll go away, little boy, for today,
BUT I’LL COME BACK AND KILL YOU TONIGHT!’* ”

"What a nightmare you had,"
Said his parents, and smiled.
"What a dreamer, that lad.
What a boy! What a child!"
They would not even *look* underneath Johnny's bed.
For the Ogre was only a nightmare, they said.

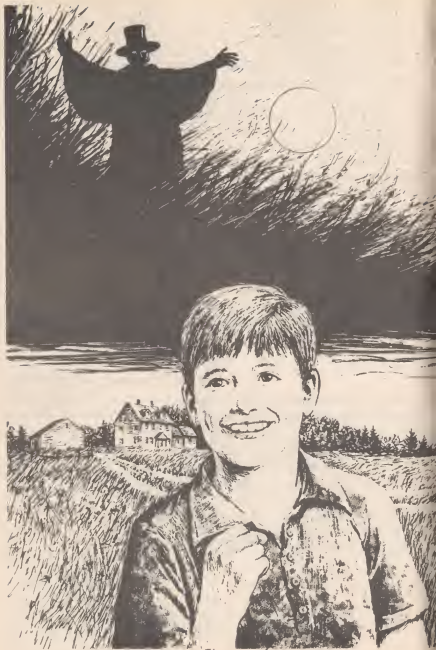
But his grandmother came and she took Johnny's hand,
And she spoke in a way little boys understand:
"*There will always be Ogres to scare you,*" she said,
"*And monsters will always be under your bed.*
You can't run away from the shadows of fear.
But the way to erase them
Is: stand up and face them
And fight them and chase them, and they'll disappear . . ."

So Johnny went back to his bedroom that night
And he lay in the stillness, alone with his fright,
And he tried very hard not to cry.
And the Ogre came at him from under the bed
And its long yellow fingers encircled his head
And the Ogre said: "**Johnny! GET READY TO DIE!"**

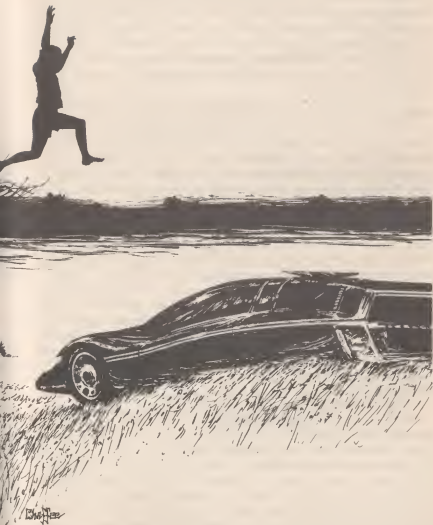
* * *

Next morning the house was still as a tomb;
No sound emanated from young Johnny's room.
But from under his door, all along the bare floor,
Trickled something unpleasant and red.
And his parents, not knowing what they should expect,
Broke open his door and they found the place wrecked.
But they pulled Johnny free from beneath the debris,
And he managed to stand, and he pointed his hand
At a thing in the corner that quivered and bled,
And the boy told his mother: "*The Ogre is dead.*"

— F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre



THE PERFECT DAY
by James Turpin
art: Doug Chaffee



A ladybug was crawling on his ear. At least, Billy hoped it was a ladybug. If it was a wasp he would probably get stung. He wanted to reach up and find out for sure, but that might be the wrong thing to do, so he pretended to be concentrating on his *Tommy Tomorrow* comic book. Maybe if he kept reading he would forget about the ladybug (surely it wasn't a wasp, the feet felt too close together).

That reminded him of his own feet, which were caked with bits of mud from his earlier romp through the sprinkler. He wiggled his toes experimentally, and felt the half-dried ooze crumble away in parts. He grinned and leaned back against the trunk of the Chinese elm. With his eyes closed he could better hear the rushing of the hot Kansas wind through the branches above, but he was safe and comfortable in the tree's shade. Sanctuary. Cool warmth.

Keith Taylor would be over soon. The two boys had been planning the occasion for nearly a week. As Billy stared out across the distant heat waves passing between himself and the ripening fields of wheat, he clapped his hands in anticipation. It had been a good day so far, the perfect afternoon, and he and Keith were to be allowed to camp out in the backyard that night. Billy had saved a half-dozen sparklers from the Fourth of July, and they were to be part of the evening festivities, along with the hot dogs and ice cream his mother had promised.

The ladybug flew away while he was thinking, but he didn't notice until it was already gone. He had decided to walk out to the billboard located in the field beside his house; it gave a better view of the highway, so he could watch for the red Rambler station wagon Keith's mother always drove. His dog, Sam, deserted the bone he had been chewing to accompany his master. Sam was gold and white, too small to be a real collie, and too lanky to be a terrier. The boy half-skipped his way toward the sign, Sam leading and alert for rabbits and field mice. Billy became more cautious as he came to the heads of golden wheat. His dad had warned him often enough not to go trampling Mr. Kinney's crop down. The boy slid carefully between the rows, and made Sam follow him.

He was nearly to the billboard when he noticed a small cloud just peeping over the southern horizon. A frown crossed his face.

"That kinda bothers me, Sam. Sure hope it doesn't rain tonight."

The dog was inspecting a suspicious burrow and didn't seem to hear, so Billy continued toward the billboard. Someone had recently covered up the old ad with a shiny red **Phillips 66** slogan. It was real neat. Billy was proud because he thought of it as *his* billboard, it being the only one along the highway for many miles. It was tall and long, huge up close. When he reached it, he sat down in its shade and began digging clods out of the field to throw into the drainage ditch.

Each time a vehicle topped the distant hill, he studied it. A truck passed, and a bus, then a green Chevrolet pickup with a German

shepherd riding in the back. Then the road was vacant for a long time.

"Sure hope it doesn't rain, Sam," Billy said again. "Wish Keith would get here."

Four more cars passed before Billy caught sight of the red Rambler. He jumped up and ran waving toward his home, Sam close to his heels, and managed to intercept the car half-way down a long dirt drive that circled the house. The two boys met in a rush, and immediately headed toward the garage to dust off the tent, leaving Keith's mother to make arrangements for her son's return the next day.

The boys stepped back to survey their handiwork.

"It doesn't look just right," Keith said.

"It's pretty close, though."

"They never look that way on 'Rat Patrol'."

The tent had a definite sag in the middle, and the stakes on the right side were pulled tighter than those on the left.

"Dad can help us when he gets home," Billy said.

Something made him turn just then, toward the south. The cloud he had noticed earlier had been joined by a handful of others. These were darker than the first.

At about the same time, a car came over the hill, looking for all the world as if it had popped out of one of those clouds. Billy watched the onrushing auto, and tried to make out its color. From a distance it looked the same hue as the gray of the approaching rainstorm.

"What's the matter?" Keith asked. "How come you look so scared?"

"I ain't scared. I'm just watching that car."

"What about it?"

The vehicle activated its left blinker and came up the drive. Billy had never seen anything like it. It was real long and fancy, and sort of funny-looking, like something out of a comic book. And it wasn't gray. It was black. Coffin black. Outer space black.

It stopped short of the house. It was impossible to see inside it; the windows were black too, but pretty soon the one on the right-hand side rolled down, accompanied by a funny, electric hum. A gloved hand reached out and beckoned the boys.

"Come over here, lads," a deep, raspy voice said.

The two complied, though Billy kept a pace behind Keith. They were right next to the car before they could see the driver, and when they did, Billy almost ran away. He would have, if his friend hadn't spoken.

"Hi, mister. Who are you?"

"Libby's the name. You must be Keith."

The man in the car was like the vehicle itself, made more of blackness than anything else. The whole right side of his face was shadow. Deep darkness. It covered his features, so that Billy could barely see his eyes.

His nose was sharp and cruel, and he had a black moustache that curled around into two tight circles above his mouth. He wore a tall hat, which seemed to cast most of the shadows. It was a top hat, like the ringmaster at a circus might wear, except it, too, was black. He was wearing some sort of riding cloak.

"Billy, don't you know who I am?" Mr. Libby said.

Billy had trouble finding his voice. He tried not to look at the dark face, or think about the rasping voice. He looked out toward the gathering storm.

"Yeah, I know. You're the Shadow Man."

"Why do you call me that, Billy?"

The boy shrugged and took a step away from the car.

"How would you lads like to ride in my new automobile?" the Shadow Man asked.

"Wow, that'd be neat!" Keith said. "But I don't think my mom would like it."

Billy looked at his friend in horror. Didn't Keith see how evil the Shadow Man was? Couldn't he tell?

"No, we better not," he said hurriedly. "My folks told me never to ride with people I don't know."

"But you know me, Billy. I'm from the Syntaps Company. You've surely heard of it."

"No, mister, I haven't. You must be confused or something. Me and Keith got to go now."

"Stay awhile and talk. It won't hurt."

"We gotta go!" Billy yelled, and sped off toward the back of the house. Bewildered, Keith followed.

"What's with you?" he demanded, when he caught up with his friend.

"You some kind of dope or something? Didn't you see his hat and moustache?" Billy said. "Don't you recognize a bad man when you see one?"

"You're crazy," Keith said. "He wasn't wearin' no hat. And he didn't have a moustache."

"He must be a magician, then. He's got you fooled. He's a bad man, and he's come to take me away!"

"He looked all right, more like a salesman, but if you want to pretend he's the bad guy, it's okay with me. This tent can be our fortress, where we plan how to stop him."

The car had pulled up to Billy's house, and the Shadow Man stepped out. Sam barked at him as he went up to the house, and nipped at his heels, but the Shadow Man wore heavy black boots.

"He'll get Mom!" Billy cried, but he didn't dare take a step toward the house. He was too afraid. For long, awful moments he waited out in the yard, while Keith tried to straighten the tent.

After a short time, Billy's mother stepped from the house. The relieved boy ran to her, but he skidded to a halt when she said, "Billy, there is a man here to see you."

He tried to back towards the tent, but she already had a hold on his hand. "Ma, me and Keith were playin'."

"Well, you'll have to stop your play for a minute."

Billy was led into the house. Inside, the kitchen was filled with the aroma of chocolate chip cookies, but he didn't notice. His stomach was crawling.

The Shadow Man sat on the couch in the living room.

"Billy, I want you to meet Mr. Libby. He works with Doug Randell, your scout leader."

"I've heard a lot about you, Billy. Mr. Randell has nominated you for a special Order of the Arrow camping trip. It will include a tour of Washington D.C."

"I don't want to go! I want to stay right here."

"Billy!" his mother warned.

"Let me talk with him, Mrs. Martin. He probably doesn't understand the offer."

The last thing Billy wanted was to be left alone with the Shadow Man. He looked huge, sitting there, dark as darkness. But it was too late. His mother had already retreated. When she was out of earshot, the Shadow Man leaned toward him and said quietly in his harsh voice, "Billy, I haven't much time. Deep down I think you know why I've come all the way to Kansas."

"To take me away," the boy whispered. "Forever."

"Now, Billy, maybe not forever. You can always come back and visit. Syntaps might allow that. It's my job to take you away, and I've come through a great deal of danger to do it."

"You won't! My dad won't let you."

"Your parents have nothing to do with this, Billy. It's between you and me. You must decide to come back with me. People are depending on you."

"What people?"

"Many, many people. Those at Syntaps, others you have known. Do you remember, Billy Martin?"

"What if I decide not to go? This is my home."

"Billy, we no longer have the power to remove you. We lost that. That is why I've been sent, to reason with you. Please, you must leave with me. I'm not even certain I can find my way out alone."

"That's a lie, I'll bet. You better leave me alone, mister, or my dad'll knock you flat."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Martin, why don't you enjoy the afternoon. Go play. We will talk again this evening."

The Shadow Man's last words didn't really matter much because Billy had already bolted for the door. He skidded through the kitchen and plunged outside. His mother's call echoed behind him, but he pretended not to hear.

A few moments later the Shadow Man left the house, got in his car, and drove away.

"Looks like your worries are over," Keith said.

Billy watched the vanishing cloud of dust and shook his head.

During the remainder of the afternoon, the two boys played army. Billy had nearly forgotten about the Shadow Man, when he noticed that the storm clouds had drawn nearer. They were rolling fiercely, and covered all of the southern sky.

About the same time Keith pointed toward the billboard. The Shadow Man was there, standing in its shade. Watching. His car was nowhere in sight.

They watched him until Billy's mother called them in for supper. The hot dogs were ready, and while the pair ate, Billy's dad drove up in the company car. Billy jumped from his chair and rushed into his father's arms.

"Dad, dad, you gotta stop the Shadow Man. He's come to get me!"

"Whoa, son," Mr. Martin said, lifting the boy up. "What's all this about?"

"I'll tell your father about Mr. Libby," Mrs. Martin said.

"No! He's got mom fooled. Let me!"

"Billy that will be all!" his mother said, suddenly angry. "You've embarrassed me about enough for the day! Now I want you to go eat, right this minute! Let's go in the living room, poppa, and I'll tell you how your son has been acting."

After a few moments quiet discussion, Billy's father came out of the living room and went outside.

"Dad will recognize the Shadow Man. You'll see," he whispered to Keith.

Billy couldn't resist peeking out the screen door. When he did, he saw his father shaking hands with the Shadow Man. Both were smiling and talking. Billy moaned.

When Mr. Martin came back, his expression was stern, but his eyes were twinkling. "I'm proud of you, son. Mr. Libby is giving you quite an honor. Wouldn't you like to go to Washington D.C. with a bunch of other scouts? You could see where the President lives."

"Dad, he won't ever let me come back. Didn't you see how bad he was?"

"What kind of games have you boys been playing? What makes you think Mr. Libby is a bad man?"

"I just know it, daddy! I just know! He'll carry me off and I'll never see any of you again!"

"Now listen, Billy. I don't know where you got such an idea. Your mother called your scoutmaster, and he said he had contacted Mr. Libby."

"Mom couldn't have called Mr. Randell!" Billy insisted.

"What do you mean, son, couldn't?"

A thick silence fell upon the room, broken only by Sam, who was at the screen door whimpering to get in. Billy felt as if he stood over a great emptiness. Tears started to flow down his cheeks.

"She just couldn't, that's all," he muttered, staring down at his feet.

"Now, none of that. Let's act like a man, son. I'll make a deal with you. You go outside and play now, but you think about this trip. I believe when you see what Mr. Libby is offering, you may change your mind."

After dinner, Mr. Martin brought out the bucket for making home-made ice cream. Billy and Keith helped crush the ice, and then both boys took turns turning the crank, until it got so hard that even together they couldn't budge it. Billy's dad took over, and while the ice cream was making, he allowed them to light up their sparklers.

For a time Billy forgot his worries beneath the glow of the forgotten gaudies from Independence Day. The boys ran in circles in the yard, each carrying a pair of sparklers, while Sam chased them, barking, his animal eyes glowing with the flames. The lights twirled until both boys were breathless and dizzy, but they ran around and around the house, laughing and chasing one another. In the end, with their torches all extinguished, they began to wrestle. The darkness held only their gasping giggles, as they took turns throwing each other to the grass.

Finally, Billy had Keith pinned, and both were too out of breath to continue. Or to move. They were sweat and grass, the pumping of lungs, and sweet laughter. They shook hands and went to check the ice cream.

They sat with their backs to a tree, eating their chocolate swirl. Billy was full, happy and tired. Sam nuzzled his elbow, and the crickets sang beneath the umbrella of the Milky Way. He didn't notice that most of the stars were covered with cloud.

"This has been the best day, the most perfect day." Keith said.

Billy nodded, and let Sam lick his face. "Yeah, I know. I wish it would last forever."

"Are you boys certain you wouldn't rather stay inside tonight?" his mother asked, as they bundled their sleeping bags into the tent. "It looks like rain."

"We don't mind," Billy said. "Now that dad has the tent up straight, it should keep us dry."

"Well, if it starts to lightning, you better come in."

"Leave the boys alone, Eloise," his dad said. "Lightning won't strike a tent. They'll be fine."

"Thanks, Mr. Martin," Keith said, as they wormed their way into the comfortable darkness. Once Sam and the sleeping bags were comfortably situated, Billy hung one of the flashlights from the roof of the tent.

"This is neat!"

"Yeah. Hey, you want to play SUBMARINE FLEET?"

"Sure. That's a keen game!"

Billy had stowed the board game in the tent earlier in the day, and they dug the contents out of the box eagerly. The game involved the capturing of submarines, and the children became quickly lost in the play.

"Dive, dive, dive," Keith called, as an imaginary torpedo barely missed one of his boats. "Hey, Billy, you think the Shadow Man is still outside?" As quickly as he said it, a bit of fear touched his eyes.

"Yeah, but I don't want to talk about it. Okay?"

"You don't think he will try to take you away while we're asleep, do you?"

Just then the thunder rolled overhead, and the boys both jumped.

"Let's play some more, Keith. He can't come get me. He said so. I have to agree to go with him."

"But what if you don't agree?"

"It's your move. Just play the game, alright?"

After SUBMARINE FLEET, they both got in their sleeping bags and started playing flashlight chase, a game of tag that used the two beams of light as men, and the roof of the tent as the field. Around and around the bright hunters went, and by the time they were through, Billy and Keith were giggling and sleepy.

Billy put aside all thoughts of the Shadow Man, despite the thunder and falling rain just outside the tent. It had been a long day, and he fell asleep quickly.

When he awoke, the door of the tent had come unzipped. Cold rain was blowing on his face. He caught a glimpse of Keith during a lightning flash, but his friend was still asleep. He was afraid, but he decided to be brave and shut the flap.

Just when he was about to bring the zipper down, the lightning flashed again. He saw a split-second of clouds and grass. And he saw the Shadow Man standing beneath the old Chinese elm, just a few feet from the tent. Just standing. And watching, while the rain ran off his hat.

Billy wanted to close the flap, but for some reason he didn't. Sam had risen to join him, and had begun to whine softly. He petted the animal. Then, with sudden resolve, he dressed and went out to meet the Shadow Man. Sam followed.

The Shadow Man was even more horrible in the night. He stood with

his unwinking eyes and his darkness. The rain seemed to lessen as Billy approached him.

"Billy," the hoarse voice said. "It's nearly midnight. Do you know what that means?"

"No," Billy quivered. "The end of the day, I guess."

"Yes. Do you remember what Syntaps is, Mr. Martin?"

"Sorta. And don't call me Mr. Martin. I don't like it."

"I will tell you, Mr. Martin. Syntaps was created just a few years ago. Brain-cell manipulation is used extensively as part of its work. Do you understand?"

Billy shook his head desperately.

"I think you do. You've known from the moment I arrived here, at least subconsciously. Billy, Syntaps offers people incredible vacations. Syntaps taps into memories, locates those brain cells which hold the individual's most wonderful fantasies, or their most precious remembrances. Now do you see?"

"I won't. I won't! You're a wicked man!"

"Only because you see me that way. You've put me in this form, the shadowy figure of a cartoon villain. You know it's true. If this were real, do you believe your parents would let me stand in the rain all night? They can react only as you recall them, slightly different if I impose my presence on them as I did this afternoon.

"You have to face it, Billy. Your mother and father have been dead for over fifteen years. This is just a vacation."

Billy tried to run, but Libby caught him by the arm, causing the boy to stumble. He fell on the wet grass, his arms clutching at Sam.

"Leave me alone. *Leave me alone!*"

"I can't. Your time is up. Your day is over."

"You're the one who brought the rain, aren't you?"

"Of course. It takes a great deal of expense and time for Syntaps to cause changes in the fantasy. You've been at the lab for the last thirty-seven days. They had to do something to spoil your perfect day. Otherwise you would have relived it, over and over again, for the rest of your life."

"It's the money, isn't it?" Billy was crying and holding Sam.

"Syntaps accepts the full blame. They try to screen out individuals such as yourself, but occasionally one gets by. Insurance covers their losses, but they can't shut off the machines without killing you in the process. You have to agree to come back."

Billy's crying ceased. His voice suddenly took on an adult tone, one that part of him didn't really recognize. One that frightened him.

"I want to stay. This is better. Did you know that old Sam lived to be thirteen years old? Thirteen years! That's a long time for a dog. I've never forgotten him. And now he's back. They're all back! I want to stay."

"It's no good. It's all ruined for you, Billy. And it's nearly midnight, when the cycle starts again. Come with me. Come away."

"No, I won't!" Billy cried. High overhead the clouds were boiling; the lightning was flashing continuously. Billy jumped up and began to run, head down. At his back he could hear the sound of the Shadow Man's boots, splashing through the rain.

He darted around the corner of the house, and headed toward Mr. Kinney's wheatfield, but the rain made it hard to gain traction. Like a dream he had dreamt once, where he could run only in slow motion, each inch a desperate effort, he turned to see the Shadow Man hurrying behind him, coming closer and closer.

The dark, gloved hands were closing on his collar, when Sam darted between Libby's legs. He stumbled over the dog, and fell headlong into a mud puddle. He cursed. Billy ran.

The wheat was tall. It looked frightening in the darkness, for the wind made it hiss, but Billy welcomed its touch around his waist. He knew from the games he and Keith had played, on warm days when his parents hadn't been outside to see them, the best way to hide in a wheat field. He knew to travel up the furrows, instead of running across them, so that he would leave no trail of broken stalks.

The Shadow Man had just entered the field when Billy dropped to his knees, onto the damp earth. In the darkness and the rain, his footprints were invisible. He could not be tracked. He wormed his way in the opposite direction the Shadow Man would expect him to go, back toward the house.

Soon he heard Libby thrashing through the wheat. He was quite close, searching desperately. Billy tried not to breathe. His heart pounded at his temples, and the panting of the dog beside him sounded louder than the wind running through the field.

The Shadow Man was almost upon him. Just beside him. Passing behind him. Moving away.

Billy began to crawl again.

"Billy," the Shadow Man called out. The boy smiled. His voice sounded a little worried. "It's nearly midnight, Billy. Almost time for it to begin again, just as it does every midnight. Don't make me come back tomorrow. You can't win. I'll come back every day. Come out, Billy. Come home."

Once he got far enough away, Libby could never find him. It was a big field. All he had to do was hide until midnight.

He went several yards before the Shadow Man suddenly grew quiet. He raised up slightly, to peer between the heads of wheat.

The Shadow Man was gone!

It was a trick. The worst kind of trick. It made him want to jump up and run. But he knew that was what the Shadow Man wanted. He was about

to hide again when he noticed that the sky was changing colors. He held his hand over his mouth, so he wouldn't cry out. They were changing things again! They were making something horrible light up the eastern sky. To ruin his perfect day. He didn't want to look, but he couldn't help it. He turned his head almost painfully in the direction of the light.

The clouds were thinning, but in their place an evil, blood-red moon was rising. What he had always thought they meant when they said, a hunting moon. A moon meant for hunting him. He shuddered.

A dark hand touched his shoulders.

He screamed and bit, and clawed until the Shadow Man yelled in pain. Billy ran free. He fled down the long furrows, as hard as he could go.

The wheatfield was changing around him. Ahead of him were tall rows of hedges. He didn't recognize them for the maze they were until he had already plunged between them. He would have turned back then, but the Shadow Man was too close. So he ran, between the high, dense columns of shrubbery. The path twisted and turned, opened up, and became more narrow. He encountered walls of the growth and had to brake often to avoid crashing into the thorns. Sometimes as many as four individual paths would present themselves. Each time he chose one at random; never the same twice.

Then the thing he had feared occurred. He found himself in a cul-de-sac. He searched frantically for an opening. He tried to tear through the hedges, but the thorns drove him back.

"Billy, do you know who I really am?" a voice behind him said. He turned to face his enemy.

"I am more than you imagine," Libby said. "Behold my face."

Billy looked into the darkness of the Shadow Man's face. At first he could see nothing, except that it was terrible. Then the deep blackness seemed to shift, and lighten. It became a new face, one that made Billy cry out.

"Not just a shadow has invaded your perfect day, Bill," a voice that was not Libby's said.

"Mr. Smothers, sir," Billy said. "You go away. You don't belong here. You're not a part of this."

"Oh, but I am. After all, I've been your employer for better than fifteen years. I've put up with you that long. I should be like family."

"You stay away from me. You go back out there, where you should be."

The neck of the Shadow Man's body slowly shook the face of Mr. Smothers.

"I'll never leave, Bill, now that I've found you. What's the matter, anyway, can't handle the pressure?"

The Shadow Man lurched at the little boy. Billy managed to grab a rock, even as he was thrown to the ground. He struck out blindly. The

Shadow Man gave a cry and crumpled on to the child.

Billy pulled himself out from under his enemy. He would have run, but the Shadow Man lay very still.

"You can't trick me, Mr. Libby."

Billy kicked at him. When there was still no response, he started to leave. Even as he did so the Shadow Man turned his head upward. Billy screamed and backed into the shrubs.

Libby's face had changed again. It was Susan now. His wife, Susan.

"You shouldn't have left us, Bill," a woman's soft voice said. "How could you do this to me and the kids? I don't know why I married you. You're such a loser!"

"How can you say that?" the little boy said. "I believed that you would understand, Susan. Of all people I thought you would understand."

"Because I always have? Well, I'm tired of making excuses for you. I despise you for what you've done. Why can't you be more of a man?"

He didn't hear the rest. He was running. Blindly, without hope. He stumbled into shrubs and emerged bleeding. He tripped over stones and tree roots, and fell without feeling the pain. Each time he glanced back he saw another face, his children, his friends, all accusing him, all shouting in their own voices words he had hoped never to hear.

The maze opened into a large arena, one filled with crumbling, half-legible grave markers. He circled around them, along the wall of shrubbery, looking for an opening. When he had nearly completed the circuit he halted, for the Shadow Man was walking slowly toward him.

He fell to his knees.

"Please."

"Billy," a new voice said, as the face changed again. "Answer me, Billy."

Billy fell face down in the cold grass. It was raining again, though he couldn't remember when it had begun.

"Answer me, Billy."

"Yes, dad," he finally said.

"You know I'm dead, don't you son?"

"Yes. But I don't want you to be," he said through a sob.

"We all die, Billy. But I have something I want to tell you."

Billy looked up.

"I never loved you, son."

A look of pain crossed the boy's face. "That's not true. My dad would never tell me that."

"What of the things all those other people said? Your wife. Your friends. Your children. Were they true?"

Billy looked down at the ground. He shrugged.

"Then why should it be a lie when I say that I never loved you?"

Tears began to fill Billy's eyes, but the flow abruptly stopped. A look of

anger rushed across his face.

"No," he whispered.

"Yes."

"No," he said softly, and he stood. "You're wrong, and you're trying to take everything from me. My father always loved me! I know that. I know that better than I know anything! You can't lie to me about that, Mr. Libby." The thunder rumbled just overhead.

"It's true," Libby said, with the voice of Billy's father. He took a step forward. "It's completely true."

"No!" Billy screamed. He was burning with anger now, filled with hate for the Shadow Man. "You leave me alone!"

The Shadow Man was coming closer. Billy backed up until he felt the thorns of the hedge digging into his back.

"I wish I had never had a son," the Shadow Man said.

The thunder was booming everywhere. The lightning crossed the sky in multiple forkings. Billy's anger filled him. Then he reached up, up into the sky he had created, into the world of his making, to call down the lightning.

It came with a brilliant flash, and a smell of sulphur. It coursed into the body of the Shadow Man, whose scream rent the air. Billy fell to his knees. When he could see again, the Shadow Man was gone. All that remained was a lingering blue cloud.

Sobbing, the boy turned away, back toward the exit. "I warned you," he muttered to the rain. "I warned you. You should have left me alone. And it's nearly midnight."

He was walking beside the rows of grave markers, the sullen accusing stones. He tried not to look at them. It seemed a long way back to the beginning of the circle. He sped up his pace. Sometimes his eyes would drift over the etchings on the tombs, but he tried not to read any of them.

A gust of wind came whirling by, and something black went running to Billy's right. He jumped to the left, tripped over a narrow marker and fell face down directly before a grave. As he lifted his eyes he could not help but read the letters.

Dearest Mother, Eloise Martin.

He backed away from the marker on his hands and knees, and stood up hurriedly.

"You don't belong here, either," he said.

As he started to walk again, he saw the black object that had so startled him. It was the Shadow Man's hat. He looked all around, and started walking again. He was too tired to run, too tired to even trot. But he walked as fast as he could go.

A meadowlark cried to his left, and he jumped again. When he looked at it, the marker on which it stood hurried to his eyes. **George Martin, Beloved Father.**

He began to run anyway, despite the pain in his sides. But when he came to the opening of the arena, a tombstone much smaller than any of the others, that was cracked at the top, barred his way. Moss grew along one side, and it had no flowers.

"I won't read it," he said. "I won't read it."

He looked at the hedge, stared at each individual leaf, trying to count them as he walked past.

"I won't read it." He was nearly beyond it. A moment more and he would never, ever have to read the lettering on the grave.

His eyes betrayed him with a glance. He tried to lie to himself, to say that he hadn't understood, but his eyes filled with tears and he fell down before the grave.

KEITH TAYLOR

beloved son

1955-1966

"No, please. No!"

"It will occur in less than a year, Billy," the voice of the Shadow Man said. He was standing beyond the grave, his hat on his head again.

Billy was too tired to run, too filled with grief. "It was never the same after that. Never! My mother got sick a little while later. My parents changed. It was all over. All the perfect days. I didn't know about it until then — about death. About anything. I don't know why Keith had to die!"

He cried for long moments, until the Shadow Man spoke again.

"Billy, did your father love you?"

"Yes. Very much."

"I could not lie to you about that, could I? Does Susan love you?"

Billy was silent for a moment. "Yes, she does," he said softly.

"Does your employer hate you?"

"No. I guess not."

"But you feared he would. Finally, you imagined he did."

"There was so much pressure. I felt I was failing . . . all of them."

Billy felt the touch of a hand on his shoulder. He looked up in surprise, for there were also tears in the eyes of the Shadow Man.

"Billy, do you know who I am?"

Billy looked down at the ground. "I think so."

"When left to its own devices, sometimes the mind will heal itself," the Shadow Man said.

"You're me," Billy said, looking back up. "The part that knows we have to go back. The part that showed me my own fears . . ."

"So that you could face them with the lightning," the Shadow Man whispered. "Only I understand you. Come here, Billy."

The little boy ran into the big arms of the Shadow Man, and they wept, both together, among the gravestones.

They talked for a long time, it seemed to Billy, though the moon did not change position all the while. They spoke of old friends and relatives, of days lost, and of Easter eggs found. They talked of Christmas, of jokes in the rain, secret forts and magic rings. Of the Day of the Dust Storm, and Cousin Jimmy's birthday. And when they were done talking it seemed they had said it all, there in the cemetery, beneath the summer sky.

When they walked through the exit of the arena they found themselves beside the driveway. The black car was waiting, and Sam sat beside it.

"It's past midnight, isn't it?" Billy asked.

"Yes. Are you ready?"

"Shouldn't I go tell my folks good-bye?"

The words caught in the Shadow Man's throat at first, but he finally said, "No. They could never understand, and it would only make it more difficult. There is only old Sam. He will know."

The boy and the man went to the dog and petted him together.

"Good-bye Sam," Billy said.

"He is the hardest because he never changed, not in all the years of his life," the man said. "But what a glorious life he had here, Billy."

Billy hugged the animal. "I know. But I'll never forget you, old dog. I'll never forget any of this."

He turned and climbed into the passenger side. The car started with a whirr.

A modern whirr.

It eased out of the driveway. He looked back, just once, at the old house, and the dog who had already trotted back to the yard.

"There's just one more thing I'd like to tell you, before this journey ends," the Shadow Man said.

"What's that?"

"Just that I think we can make it now. And I'm glad we had this chance to talk."

The two looked at one another, and both exchanged sudden sad smiles.

"Me, too."

The car hurried through the night, toward the piercing light of the present.

James Turpin writes that this is his first sale. His wife is a pharmacist, and together they recently purchased their own pharmacy. "Which means I can get my typing paper and ribbons wholesale," the author informs us. On perfect days, when he is writing stories or recording songs, he is also the Business Manager of the Morton, Texas, school district. Jim adds that he and his wife have turned over control of their lives to the two dogs who own them. Research for new story?



**ON THE DREAM
CHANNEL PANEL**
by Ian Watson
art: Artifact



Ian Watson is an Englishman, born in 1943, a graduate of Oxford who has lectured in English, in Tanzania and Tokyo. He has been a full-time writer since 1976. His first novel, The Embedding (1973) was a runner-up for the John W. Campbell Memorial Award. Since then he has gained an enviable reputation for a series of novels, most of them dealing with the limits of perception and human experience. Titles include The Jonah Kit, The Martian Inca, Alien Embassy, Miracle Visitors, and Under Heaven's Bridge (with Michael Bishop). A collection of his stories is The Very Slow Time Machine.

I had always regarded myself as a vivid dreamer, but even I was amazed when my dreams were interrupted by the advertisements.

I was climbing by rope ladder up the outside of a lighthouse to catch an airship due to depart from the top — all in my dream, of course — when the scene suddenly blanked out and cans of food were dancing round me to jolly musical accompaniment, mainly percussion.

The labels showed some peculiar fruit or vegetable, which at first I took to be maize but then decided looked more like a hairy banana; and a moment later the tops of the cans ripped off of their own accord, and the contents emptied out, *steaming*, on to floating plates — so those must have been self-heating cans, only no one had put self-heating cans on the market just yet. Stripped of their hairy yellow skins, the insides of the “fruits” seemed more like frankfurters.

A choir of disembodied voices sang out gaily, “*Pop a can of kallopies!*” And there was I back on the rope ladder again. The dream continued . . .

“Have you ever heard of a tropical fruit called a *kallopie*?” I asked Phyllis when I got to school the next morning. Phyllis teaches Geography.

“You can get all sorts of imports at the Third World Food Centre,” she said. “Okra, yams, breadfruit. Maybe you can get whatever it is there.”

“But have you ever heard of them?”

“No,” she admitted. “What are they? Where are they from?”

Not from the Third World, I thought; just from the world of my dreams. But since when did dreams have commercial breaks in them?

I pursued this line of thought. It so happened that the commercial TV networks had been blacked out by strikes for the past week; and while I hardly regarded myself as the kind of TV addict likely to suffer from withdrawal symptoms, maybe without knowing it *I was*. Were we not all conditioned, to a greater or lesser degree, by advertising? Wasn't it a sad fact that commercials were often better made than the programmes? Hence my subconscious felt obliged to offer a substitute . . .

Admittedly this was a far-out hypothesis, but it led on to the thought

that if I, a fairly selective viewer, was hallucinating advertisements in my dreams, how much more so must many of the school kids (TV addicts all of them) be feeling the strain?

My second class that day was Current Affairs; so I decided that we would discuss the role of the mass media. Who knows, maybe I was the first adult to notice this quaint phenomenon, of advertising-dreams?

After a while I asked the class, "Do any of you ever *dream* about watching TV? For instance, how about last night? Think back!"

Alas, no one could recall anything. Still, that wasn't at all unusual. So I set my class a simple project: to keep pencil and paper by their beds and note down the first thought in their minds when they woke up. For this is an infallible way of remembering dreams. However absurd or random, and eminently forgettable, that first thought might seem to be, nevertheless once capture and fix it, and like a string of silk scarves emerging by magic from a conjuror's sleeve, in its wake dream after dream would spill forth from amnesia into the light of day.

My own dreams were broken into again that night. As I lay abed in my little bachelor flat, enjoying some wonderfully Byzantine spy story of my unconscious mind's devising, suddenly there came a commercial for *koozels* — which were apparently a crunchy snack wondrous to the taste buds.

The next morning I was supposed to be teaching that same class the history of the French Revolution; but I checked up on the assignment first.

About half of the class had done as I'd asked, probably because of the novelty value; so I put it to them, "Did any of you have a dream interrupted by some sort of advertisement — like a commercial on TV?"

And the jailbait of the group, sexy fifteen-year-old Mitzi Hayes stuck her hand up. She alone.

"A voice was trying to sell me something crunchy and delicious."

"Called what, Mitzi?"

"A noodle."

General hilarity erupted; the rest of the class were sure she was japing me.

"Think, Mitzi."

"No, a *koozel*: that's what it was!"

"Anyone else?"

"No one else."

So I quickly switched over to the topic of Robespierre, determined to avoid the teacher's trap of asking young Mitzi, when school was out, to a coffee bar to discuss her sleeping activities . . .

What I did instead was place a small ad in the local newspaper: "*Koozels or kallopies? Anyone who dreams of these please reply Box 17 in confidence.*"

And for good measure, digging deeper into my pocket, I placed similar small ads in four national newspapers.

Within a week I had eleven replies. Remarkably, most were from Appleby itself; and none was from further away than twenty miles.

So the twelve of us — discreetly excluding Mitzi — got together at my flat one evening the following week.

We were a retired dentist, an antiquarian bookseller, a ladies' hairdresser, a butcher, a hamburger cook, a shop assistant, a secretary, an unemployed plumber, a garage mechanic, a middle-aged lady medium, a postman, and a teacher (myself). So we constituted ourselves the "Dream Channel Panel," with myself as Chairman, and tried to puzzle out what the explanation was, and who we could complain to.

Max Edmunds was our dentist; and in his opinion some scientific laboratory in this very average — and thus ideal — town of Appleby had been funded by big advertising money to build a prototype dream-transmitter which could interfere with the brain waves of sleeping people and insert messages. He pointed to the restricted radius of replies I'd received, as evidence of a local source. At present only mock advertisements for imaginary products were being broadcast as tests; but soon it would be the real — and dangerously invasive — thing.

To date, by the way, another half a dozen products had paraded themselves before us in our nightly fantasies, besides repetitions of kallopies and koozels; and these had all been exotic and implausible foodstuffs: such as *kalakiko*, a powder which when sprinkled on a slice of bread promptly sprouted luscious brown mushrooms; *humbish*, an oily liquid which seemingly congealed a pint of water into lobster in aspic; and *ampathuse*, sparkling golden wine in self-chilling flasks . . . But why go on? The TV dispute was over by now; the dream-advertising wasn't.

Mary Gallagher, our medium, had originally been of the opinion that the commercials were mischievous spirit messages "from the other side." But when Elsie Levin, our cook at the new MacDonald's in town, suggested, "Perhaps it isn't *really* advertising? Perhaps it's a Government thing? Maybe it's an experiment in mind-control!" Mary threw the fat in the fire by saying, "And maybe one of *us* is actually one of *them*? If it's people, not spirits, who are doing it — why then, they could have read your small ads as easily as we could, Mr. Peck."

It took the best part of the next half hour to try to prove our *bona fides* to each other; and it was Glenda Scott, our hairdresser, who finally hauled us back on course.

"Maybe there isn't any dream-transmitter," she said. "Not in Appleby, anyway — not in *our* world. What if there's another world alongside ours: one where the people really do eat such things? What if they know how to broadcast dreams as entertainment — with commercials on the different dream-channels? And somehow we've picked these up. One of our hair

driers used to pick up radio paging at the hospital. 'Doctor Muhammed to Emergency!' "

Max Edmunds nodded. "A tooth filling sometimes picks up radio shows."

Glenda beamed at this confirmation. "So we're intercepting dream broadcasts from the other world. But not," she added for the benefit of Mary, "your 'other world.' "

"So where is it?" asked Tom Pimm, our butcher. "I don't see it."

"Of course not. How could you? You're awake, and in our world."

Max snapped his fingers. "Ah. You might have a point there! It's a well-known fact that if you keep somebody awake for long enough, they'll start hallucinating. People have to dream, and if they can't get any sleep to do it in, they'll do it wide awake. Might I suggest that one of us volunteer to stay awake for several days — while the rest of us form a rota to *keep* him awake? To see what happens."

Jon Rhys Jones, our unemployed plumber, raised his hand. "I suppose I'd better be the volunteer. Got nothing better to do, have I? And the wife's away visiting her mother."

"Over to you, Brian," Max said to me, as Chairman. "We'll only need one person on duty to start with, but after the first couple of days we'd better have several in attendance."

I took a vote on the proposal; but we were in general agreement, so I drew up a rota then and there.

"Room's swimming," mumbled Jon, five days later, as Glenda and Rog (our postman) marched him to and fro across the lounge in his house. "Can't stand up."

So they steered him to the sofa, where Max checked his pulse; then Glenda sat beside him, and periodically slapped him on the cheek like a glamorous interrogator, varying this by pinching and shaking him.

It was late Saturday night. Besides Glenda, Rog and Max, I was there, and Mary Gallagher and Tom Pimm. Empty lager cans lay about on the carpet, though we weren't allowing our volunteer to consume any alcohol in case this helped him to pass out. The TV was on, and in the kitchen a radio was playing pop music. All to keep us lively. At twelve o'clock the night shift was due to arrive.

And all week long the dream-commercials had continued to besiege us — though not Jon — most recently with outstanding claims for *sklesh*, a jar of violet paste to be spread on kallopies, as a relish.

It was eleven-thirty when it happened.

Suddenly part of the ceiling glowed — and it was as if a cornucopia opened. Or as if a jackpot had paid off in actual fruits. From nowhere, cans and jars and tins and phials fell through, bouncing on the carpet. One can hit Mary on the toe, and she squealed. We all retreated to the

walls for a while, dragging Jon with us.

In fact the shower of produce probably lasted for less than a minute, but by then the middle of the room was ankle-deep in kallopies and sklesh, kalakiko and humbush and other things — enough to fill half a dozen hampers. As soon as the shower ceased Max rushed forward, grabbed up a can of kallopies and popped it open. Immediately, with a little cry, he set it down again and blew on his fingers. Then he hastened to the kitchen and returned with plates and forks. Soon we were all picnicking on the sizzling sausage-fruits — all except for poor Jon, who had staggered back to the sofa and fallen fast asleep. Goodness, kallopies on their own tasted delicious enough; but spread with sklesh they were bliss.

"Have to give it to them," admitted Tom Pimm, kissing his fingers. "First rate. Beats any sausage I've ever made."

And Glenda winked at Mary. "Our first delivery from the other world, eh?"

The doorbell rang just then. The night shift had arrived, in time to join in the feast. But there was plenty left over afterwards.

The rota was a time-consuming business, though, and as for volunteering to be the one who stayed awake, only a few of us could spare several days at a stretch. The bookseller Don Thwaite was next; then Glenda who took a week's leave from the salon; then Mary Gallagher. By this time we had a fair stack of foodstuffs in my flat, where we had decided to centralise everything and hold all subsequent "wakes," with me keeping strict inventory. But we were all feeling frayed and exhausted when the whole of the Dream Channel Panel met on that fourth weekend for a stock-taking. Besides, there were several domestic crises brewing, due to all the hours that some members of the panel were absenting themselves mysteriously from home. Though the dream-commercials still continued, teasing us with even more fabulous luxuries.

Mary stifled a yawn. "Surely there must be a better way! I'm quite black and blue from my stint."

"But how else can we get the stuff to materialise?" asked Rog.

Mary looked around our circle; most of us were seated on the floor. "Twelve of us," she mused. "If only there were thirteen."

"That's unlucky," objected Elsie.

"Why thirteen?" Tom asked.

"The number of a coven," said Don Thwaite. "That's what you're driving at, isn't it?" He chuckled fastidiously. "However, I don't happen to be a witch."

"And neither am I!" snapped Mary, indignant. "A medium is no witch."

"She might have been," said Max, "in the Middle Ages."

"As far as I'm concerned," said Don, "a medium isn't anything at all. Mary certainly didn't conjure up the food; and it isn't made of ectoplasm. I doubt if it comes from Fairyland — or the Inferno."

"All I'm saying," said Mary, "is that we tried one strange idea already — Mr. Edmunds' notion — and it worked. But that doesn't mean it's the only way, or the best. There must be *something* about the number thirteen . . ."

I hesitated; and then confessed. "Actually, there *are* thirteen of us. There's a girl at my school who's been picking up the commercials too."

"Well, why didn't you *say*?" demanded Tom Pimm. "Good grief, if there's any easier way to get our hands on the stuff!"

"I thought she was too young to be involved."

"How old is she?"

"Fifteen."

"Just the age," said Don Thwaite wisely, "when children are supposed to produce poltergeist effects. Thanks to all the strains of adolescence, and the sexual volcano stoking up . . ."

"Well, you'd better involve her now," declared Tom.

"And so say all of us." Rog, who had dark rings under his eyes, nodded.

"But I can't do that! I'm her teacher. How can I possibly invite a girl pupil along to what'll look like a coven?"

"Quite easily," said Glenda, juggling with a jar of sklesh. "She'll be flattered."

"I refuse. It's too risky."

However, the Dream Channel Panel voted me down.

"This is Mitzi," said I, leading her into my crowded flat the following Saturday.

I had kept my invitation as low-key as I could, while still asking her to tell no one; and had stressed that it was to meet friends of mine who were interested in her dreams. But Mitzi turned up at the door wearing a brief skirt and cheesecloth blouse, with her hair done in a pert ponytail and perfume subtly applied.

Whatever disappointment may have overcome her when she discovered the Dream Channel Panel in full session promptly vanished as soon as she tasted kallopies with sklesh and crunched some koozels — while I explained what had been happening during the past few weeks.

"So what do I do?" she asked us, posing in the center of the room.

"Ah now, that's just it, isn't it?" said Mary. "In my opinion we all ought to join hands and close our eyes."

"If she's supposed to be some sort of virgin witch," said Rog, eyeing Mitzi hopefully, "don't we need an altar — a table'll do — and candlesticks and a hen? And shouldn't she take her clothes off?"

"That'll do," said I sternly. "We'll try Mary's suggestion. And we'll all

chant 'Pop a can of kallopies,' and the rest of the songs."

Soon, feeling faintly absurd as though we had been translated back to childhood to games of Ring-o-Rosies, we were all shuffling round in a circle singing jingles. This was hardly the picture of a coven of warlock shoplifters. But before long something tribal and primitive seemed to grip us and wash away our embarrassment; and we really swung into the spirit of it. . . .

And part of the ceiling glowed.

No kallopies or koozels rained down, though.

Instead, what I can only call a "ladder of light" descended. Its side-rails and spokes were fluorescent tubes, but minus the glass.

"Oh," gasped Elsie Levin. "Oh."

For a moment this seemed the best comment that any of us could make; but then Mary said, "*Thirteen* rungs: count them."

We did, and she was right.

"What is it, then: Jacob's Ladder?" asked Jon Rhys Jones in wonder.

"I don't notice many angels ascending and descending," said Don Thwaite.

"Since nothing's coming down," Tom Pimm suggested, "How about one of us nipping up to see?"

All eyes turned to him. But he shuffled evasively.

"Bit on the heavy side, aren't I? Looks fragile to me." With a professional glance he weighed Mitzi up. "The girl's the lightest."

"And it *is* my ladder, isn't it?" Heedless of whether the light might burn or electrocute her, she gripped hold. Quickly she climbed up, pausing once to smooth her skirt, not that this hid much, and vanished through the glow.

A minute later her hand reached back for balance and her face peered through. She regarded us upside-down.

"Hey, there's a real feast waiting! Come on, the lot of you." Back out of sight she popped.

"I don't know about *all* of us," mused Jon Rhys Jones. "I read this book about mysterious disappearances, see . . . and, well, maybe one of us ought to hang on down below. If Tom's bothered about his weight . . ."

However, a hungry look had come over Tom Pimm's countenance. So in the end, it was our shop assistant Sandra — a shy creature — and Bob the mechanic who stayed below.

As Chairman, I was the first to follow Mitzi up. A moment later I was emerging through a similar glow in the floor of a simple open-air building: a circle of white columns supporting a cupola. Steps led on to a greensward, with woodland a few hundred yards distant. Twin fountains were spouting and splashing back into alabaster basins. Birdsong filled the air, though I didn't notice any birds. What I did observe was a whirling

kaleidoscope of colours midway between the fountains. At first I took this to be simply rainbows in the spray-drift, since the sun was shining brightly; but really the kaleidoscope was far too busy and vivid. The air smelled of lilies and honeysuckle, though I couldn't see any flowers either, only neat lawn.

Other seductive aromas floated from a long *alfresco* table spread with gourmet goodies — which Mitzi was already sampling.

As were we all, before long.

"But where are we?" wondered Glenda as she nibbled a wafer spread with humbush.

Tom Pimm grandly waved an open flask of ampthuse, and was perhaps about to offer an opinion . . . when a chime sounded through the glade. About a hundred yards away the air began to glow, and an Aladdin's palace — somewhere between the Taj Mahal and a Chinese pagoda — emerged from nowhere into solid substance, like a Polaroid picture developing. A band of people wearing skimpy tunics flocked out of it, barefoot, and headed gleefully for our rotunda and the waiting feast. Noticing us, they straggled to a halt.

Only one man and one young woman continued. She was the image of the young Brigitte Bardot; he was Cary Grant in his middle years.

As for the others: Omar Sharif, Greta Garbo, Sophia Loren, all looking their very best . . . I gave up.

"Golly!" cried Mitzi. She was the only one of us dressed like them. Which must have been why Bardot addressed her first.

"How here?"

"We climbed up this ladder out of Mr Peck's flat —" began Mitzi.

"Flat?"

"Fixed homes in heaps," commented Cary Grant. "Twentieth, twenty-first. Favourite era. Must be ex past-time. Weirdest."

"There was this glow on the ceiling. And it's in there too." Mitzi pointed at the rotunda.

Bardot skipped away and mounted the steps. Meanwhile I began explaining to Cary Grant about our dreams of kallopies and koozels; but Bardot returned before I'd quite done.

"True. Looked down. Surprise for two below!"

"Do you people have to talk like crossword puzzle clues?" grumbled Don Thwaite.

"Cross word?" Bardot looked mildly puzzled. "No, no anger. Psycho-physical weak spot detected. Maybe excessive reality alteration?"

Cary Grant nudged her. "Time travellers lured by Dreamfood. Great endorsement!"

"I don't know whether I'm dreaming or awake," said Mitzi.

Cary Grant touched the palm of his hand to her forehead, as if to feel

whether she was fevered.

"Frustration level seven," he told Bardot. "Desire level twelve! Phantasy level ten. Figures!"

"A hole in time," said Bardot. "Troublesome."

"Nonsense. Harmless. Imagine summoning great pre-Dream humans. From era of sleep and hard reality. Spearshaker, for instance. 'Imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown, turns them to shapes, gives to airy nothing a local habitation,' eh? Erase memory afterwards. Safe."

"Remind you: cannot erase subconscious memory. Besides, more likely summon black-dreamers than white. Wizards, witches, wildfolk. Recall: number thirteen."

"Just what *has* the number thirteen got to do with all this?" I interrupted them.

"Easy," said Bardot. "Thirteen-sided resonance crystals implanted here," and she touched her own forehead. "Help us tap the Power. Of Reality Flow. Energy into matter; matter into energy. Whole universe oscillates in and out of reality at every moment, as though all is but a dream in the cosmic mind. So catch it on the hop; alter bits as you wish. Change self-form. Cook up dreamfood, as could never be otherwise. Whole thing highly commercial, of course. Big Comp-brain co-ordinates all minds through crystals. Dream-patterns patented and licensed. Otherwise anarchy."

"Do you mean you can change reality at will? You can make imaginary things real?"

Bardot nodded. "World is all a dream. Science of it thus . . ."

And she explained, but I couldn't understand a word of her explanation. She was just getting on to the economics of it all — mental market forces, psychophysical supply and demand — when Cary Grant took pity. He clapped me on the shoulder.

"Eat, drink, be merry." He waved to the rest of the people who had turned themselves into film stars of our era.

"Hang on," Max Edmunds said, "if this is a world of dreams made real, then what does the world *really* look like?"

"Underneath? Under layer on layer of dream? Like geological deposits pressing down?" Cary Grant shrugged. "Who knows? Maybe it's a fossil. Dead stone."

But already Garbo and company were flooding past to the banquet, and tugging us along with them.

Tom Pimm slapped his belly.

"Full up," he announced tipsily.

"Time for Aphros, then," said Bardot.

"Afters? I couldn't eat another crumb."

"*Aphros. Aphrodisiacs.*" She whistled a sequence of notes, and out of the busy kaleidoscope between the fountains, clouds of heady vapour began to spray.

I must draw a discreet cloak over what took place on the greensward next. Suffice it to say that we were quite weary by the time those future people escorted us back inside the rotunda, to the glow.

Escorted? *Marched* us, almost.

"What century is this, anyway?" Max Edmunds thought to ask as they were popping him down the hole; but Bardot only patted him on the head and thrust him out of sight.

Tom Pimm licked his lips. "Do you always finish your meals like that?" Bardot winked, and down he went too.

Next was Mitzi, but Cary Grant felt her forehead first. "Frustration level zero. Desire level one," he told Bardot.

She laughed. "Better go last. Hole might close early."

One by one we were hastily popped through the glow. Down in my flat it turned out that Bob and shy Sandra were hurriedly pulling on their clothes in some embarrassment, with their backs turned. Aphro-gas must have drifted through . . .

Last of all came Mitzi. As her feet touched the carpet the ladder began to fade, and the ceiling darkened over. Soon there was only painted plaster above.

Tom Pimm rubbed his hands. "Right! Next Saturday, everyone?"

But during the next week I dreamed nothing memorable, and on the Saturday I found that this was true of the others too.

The thirteen of us still linked hands, danced round the room and sang jingles. But no glow appeared. No food fell. No ladder descended. In the end we had to give up.

"It's Mitzi's fault," declared Mary Gallagher. "She should have stayed pure. A virgin. It's like Mr. Edmunds said a while back . . . What did they call her up there? A sexus, was it?"

"A nexus. A connecting force." Max Edmunds nodded authoritatively. "It's all a question of adolescent libido and psychic energy. She was the paranormal channel into our dreams, and to the future Dream-world. She was the sexual volcano — and now she's blown off steam."

"And whose fault is *that*?" Tom rounded on me accusingly. "I saw you and her, after the meal."

I defended myself. Hotly. Not least because a week had gone by and normal behaviour ruled again. "Don't blame me! Bardot arranged that deliberately — to fix the weak spot."

"And now we'll never eat as well again. All thanks to you. None of the rest of us would have touched Mitzi." Tom flushed with moral

indignation.

"You were too busy with Greta Garbo," I pointed out. But I appeared to be in a weak position. For Glenda spoke out vindictively.

"What was all that about 'desire level twelve' beforehand, and 'desire level one' afterwards? What a mess you must have made of it. But what can one expect from a professional bachelor? You probably turned the poor girl off for life."

I turned to Mitzi, but she was staring away out of the window. I'd been wondering why she was wearing a shapeless sweater and old jeans; but surely that couldn't have anything to do with it.

"We'd better divvy up the takings," said Tom, just as though he was the Chairman; and no one disagreed. So he headed for my larder, to rifle it.

"Couldn't we," said I, "try a different approach?"

Jon Rhys Jones fairly glared at me. "It's all over, boy, don't you see?" I particularly resented the "boy."

But it wasn't all over.

Two months later Mitzi discovered that she was pregnant. She didn't tell me, though. The first I knew of it was when two police officers called. Because, of course, Mitzi was under the legal age for sexual relations. There was even a vague hint of unwillingness on her part. A whiff of rape rather than seduction. But I think this was just the police trying to get me to confess to something more serious, which might look better on their records.

Naturally I explained the events leading up to this awkward outcome; and referred the two officers to Glenda, Don, Max and the others for confirmation. By this date, alas, I hadn't any dreamfood left and had tossed the empties away. But I assured the officers that various cans, tubes and flasks would be buried in the garbage in-fill outside town. They might even still be lying on the surface. A search ought to turn them up. . . .

"So," said officer number one, ignoring this helpful advice as he scribbled in his notebook, "you freely admit that you had sexual intercourse with Mitzi Hayes here in your flat."

"No, no; up there." I pointed.

"On the *ceiling*? Like a fly?"

"Above."

"In the *loft*?"

"No, in the future . . . And it spoiled everything."

"I'll say it did," agreed number two sourly.

Still, they were quite formal and polite, merely arresting me and promising to corroborate my story with the others — and with Mitzi, who apparently had said nothing of the sort when they interviewed her. Well,

that was understandable.

I also referred them for good measure to the small ads I'd placed a few months earlier. Why do such a thing, if this wasn't all gospel truth? They promised to check that out too.

Would you believe it, *not one* of the former members of the Dream Channel Panel backed my story up? A few conceded that they knew me casually by sight; the others swore blind that they had never met me in their lives.

While I was out on bail pending prosecution for sexual offences against a minor — and out of my job too, pending the outcome — Jon Rhys Jones slipped round furtively to my flat one night.

"We're awful sorry, boy," was the gist of what he had to say. "You know how it is with us who have families to think about. And family businesses, such as butcher's shops. I mean, getting ourselves involved in an orgy! Good thing young Mitzi had the sense to confide in a man of experience like Tom . . ."

So that was it.

The really ironic thing was that I might have got off with a few months in jail, or even a suspended sentence. But not in view of what I'd said. This ensured that I was referred for a psychiatric report.

I had read about cases like mine before. Somebody commits a trivial offense, and next thing the poor sod is detained indefinitely at the pleasure of the overworked psychiatrists of our prison service. Because he's considered "mad" he can spend five years inside. Or ten.

Hastily swallowing my pride, I swore that I'd been lying.

And no one believed me.

Because of the newspaper ads. Which was particularly galling, as I need never have mentioned those.

Except that I had to, to explain how the Dream Channel Panel got together.

Except that it never did, according to the others — whose names I must have picked out of the phone book or a street directory, they supposed.

There was one small consolation in all this. I wasn't considered a violent sort of looney. So I wasn't sent to a high security lockup for the criminally insane miles from nowhere on some windswept moor. Instead I was despatched to a permissive prison for mild cases, where we inmates could weave baskets and grow cabbages for the Governor, and perform other useful intelligent forms of therapy.

It's been six months now, and as feared my case hasn't come up for review.

Prison food is ghastly, after you've tasted sklesh on kallopies. Boiled

cabbage, mashed potatoes, stringy stew: it's enough to drive any self-respecting gourmet round the bend.

But I'm making progress.

Because we're considered low risk in my group, the male nurses sometimes leave us in the workshop unsupervised. And I seize the opportunity to tell my fellow inmates tales of the dreamfood of the future. Not forgetting the orgy that followed.

And then I choose twelve disciples to dance round with me in a circle, singing:

"Can't refuse

"Ampathuse!"

and:

"We wish

"Humbish!"

There's no Mitzi here, of course. Women are kept apart from us. But consider: three of my group are under twenty. Morris, Martin and Paul. Morris is in here for exposing himself to little girls. Martin is a Peeping Tom. Paul stole ladies' underwear off washing lines. In their own way they're volcanoes of sexuality, and bound to be virgins too.

And all our dreams are troubled, now that I've persuaded my disciples to spit out their nightly doses of largactil and chlorpromazine, as soon as the nurses' backs are turned.

Troubled; though not quite yet by advertisements for kallopies and koozels. But if I plug away at my own propaganda, and if the prison kitchen keeps on dishing up such soggy cabbage, it's inevitable.

Consider: Frustration level ten. Desire level ten. Phantasy level ten!

We nearly did it this afternoon, too.

Thirteen of us were dancing round the workshop floor amidst neglected baskets. Morris was sweating with more than mere exertion. Paul was positively drooling. Martin looked goggle-eyed.

And a little circle upon the ceiling glowed. It wasn't only a patch of sunlight. It was The Glow.

"Keep it up!" I cried. "Pop a can of kallopies! Pop a can, pop a can! What do we wish? Humbish!"

At this point my lookout at the keyhole, Sparky Jones, an alcoholic, spotted male nurse Turner approaching at speed down the corridor. So, alas, we had to break ranks. The glow promptly faded out.

But tomorrow we'll do it. Or the week after. Now that the Dream Channel Panel is back in session again.

Food of the future, how I yearn for you!



SCREEN REVIEWS

by Baird Searles

Usually, when there's something of particular interest in the works to appear at some future time, I'll pass on the information in a final paragraph tacked onto the column; but for this issue there's a thing to come so close to home that we'll lead off the column with it. Expect a program in the fall of 1985 on NBC-TV called "Amazing* Stories"; any resemblance to the title of this magazine is hardly coincidental. To be produced by Steven Spielberg, it will be an anthology show in the tradition of "Twilight Zone" and "Alfred Hitchcock Presents." Material will be drawn from the incredibly rich backlog of stories from the nearly 60 years of this magazine's history as well as other sources, and will cover the spectrum from hard core SF to Indiana-Jones-type adventure. There may be life on TV after V yet.

This bimonth, we have something old, something new, something borrowed (I rent most of my tapes from my very congenial neighborhood video shop), but, I'm afraid, nothing blue. SF porn is a rare commodity — and probably just as well.

Rebuilt Metropolis

The movies of the second quarter (more or less) of this century — those looked back upon when movie buffs talk about "when movies were movies" — were like the great architectural wonders of England and France, those stately homes, sprawling mansions, and stone palaces that depended for their creation on masses of highly

skilled artisans who were, by today's standards, grossly underpaid. That sort of film, like those older buildings, were among the most complex and technically perfect things ever created by man — costumes, for instance, were tested for days in front of the camera to be sure that they would photograph *exactly* right. A dream world of unnerving perfection was brought before our eyes, but brought there by what could certainly be looked on as exploitation of labor; it was created by skillful workers, the likes of whom these days command high prices for their skills. So we cannot, in this unfortunate age, come close to affording that kind of perfection.

This stylized magnificence is surely a factor that accounts for the continuing popularity of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, since it was one of the most extraordinary productions ever conceived and realized. The huge sets, all triumphs of art-deco design, and the choreographed movements of hordes of extras are breathtaking; and though it's a silent film, with entirely different conventions of acting from those we are used to, any scenery-shredding by the actors is overshadowed by the sheer grandeur of it all.

For those who have never seen it: the action takes place in A.D. 2026 in Metropolis, a futuristic supercity where the elite live wa-a-a-a-y up on top in the cloud-capped towers, and the workers live wa-a-a-a-y down below, in dank underground tenements (since there seems to be no

middle class, one wonders who lives at street level). Freder, a young man from up, sees and falls in love with the saintly Maria, a young woman from down. A wicked and slightly cracked super-scientist kidnaps Maria, who has been preaching love, patience, and peace to the trodden-down downs, and gives her likeness to a soulless robot he has constructed, at the behest of Freder's father, a leader of the ups, who believes he can control the workers through this simulacrum.

But the best-laid plans of mad scientists and wicked technocrats aft whatever; and the robot Maria runs amok, indulging in orgiastic parties at the Oriental sin center of Metropolis and finally goading the workers into destroying the city's power plant, which floods the lower levels and the down homes. But through the pluck and luck of Freder and the real Maria, all ends well (if a bit damp around the edges) and the various factions of Metropolis resolve to chart a midlevel course.

One can have fun with all this, but it works; and while at first glance it seems a simplistic rehash of H.G. Wells, it isn't that easy. Lang and his co-writer (and wife), Thea von Harbou, are anti-communist *and* anti-capitalist (perhaps suggesting a longing for a middle path for Germany, which was to be perverted into the unfortunate rise of National Socialism — but enough political theorizing . . .).

Probably the hardest part of all this to take for a modern audience is the silent-screen style of acting. The handsome Gustav Frohlich in the rôle of Freder rolls his eyeballs and waves his arms in excesses that have one muttering "Steady, Freddy," at every crisis. The beautiful, slightly cross-eyed, and Olympically athletic Brigitte Helm is

almost as hyperactive in the dual rôle of Maria and the robot look-alike, but transcends fustian hyperbole with a performance of astonishing power; the difference in her body language for the two rôles is a lesson in itself, and one begins to wish for modern actresses who would (literally) fling themselves into a rôle (or two) that thoroughly.

Now the version that we have seen over the years here in America had been badly edited from its inception, and time had also taken its toll. A full-scale restoration of the film has appeared (it has been something of a surprise hit in the theaters), using newly discovered fragments and with the addition of color, the rearrangement of titles, and the addition of a sound track with musical score and sound effects. The results are a mixed blessing.

Visually the film is now absolutely splendid. The wonders of the production are for the first time revealed in full; scene after scene, familiar and unfamiliar, is clear and watchable. The addition of color is done with taste and intelligence: some scenes are in an appropriate monochrome (a blue gray for the scenes down under, a golden tint for the gardens of the elite); others are amazingly multi-colored.

Full silent-screen-type titles are used for major pieces of information that move the plot along. Dialogue is given in subtitles, something of a novelty for a silent movie; and this works very well, with the flow of the action unstopped for conversation. Because of this and the additional material, the story line is a good deal fuller and more comprehensible. (Only in a couple of places are still photos used to fill in necessary blanks; for some reason they are less obtrusive than in the other major film restoration, *A Star Is Born*.)

That's the good news. The bad news is the dreadful, inappropriate, distracting, ugly, and banal score that has been put on the sound track. (I didn't like it.)

The music is rock, tending more toward the soft than the hard. The basic problem is a simple one: what the eye is seeing could not have been made in any other period than the 1920s — it may, in fact, be the archetypal '20s visual experience. What the ear is hearing could no way have been created at any time before, say, 1975. To anyone with any sense of period whatsoever, the resulting ghastly conflict between eye and ear is painful.

I'm not saying that a contemporary score (even including rock and/or electronic elements) isn't possible — a composer with an ear for music of other times, and a sense of the part the background music plays in cinema could have subtly created a modern score that evoked the time of the film.

To add oral insult to aural injury, much of the score is not just orchestral — it's songs, *mit* words. These words have to do, in a lame-brained way, with what's happening on screen: "What's going on? What's going on?" gurgles a vocal group as the workers race around Down Town; "Hearts on fire!" gasps a female voice as Freder and Maria gaze chastely at each other. It's like having a noisy person in the seat next to you making inane comments (which happens often enough these days anyhow without the sound track doing it).

In short, the movie should be seen — but the emphasis is on *seen*. Take ear plugs, or perhaps a Walkman® with a rich, Germanic tape in it: Wagner, maybe, or Liszt. It might not match the action exactly, but it would still be better than what you'll get on the theater sound system. The ideal cir-

cumstance is to wait for this version of *Metropolis* to come out on video cassette and watch it with the sound off.

Last summer was not noted for the originality of the new films; a late entry, *The Last Starfighter*, at least had an original script in the sense that it was not based on anything, nor was it a sequel to anything. Where it was derivative, it derived from good stuff; I was put in mind of Heinlein's *Have Space Suit — Will Travel* since, like that minor classic, it had to do with a perfectly ordinary guy who wins a contest and therefore becomes embroiled in matters that can only be described as cosmic.

In this case, it's a young trailer-park inhabitant (with aspirations beyond trailer-parking) who goes over the top in a *Starfighter* electronic game ("You have been selected to join the Starfighters against the wicked Empire of . . ."). Later that evening, he discovers it's all true. By achieving his astronomical score, he's proved his top expertise in starfighting and got himself drafted into an interstellar war. On the side of the good guys, of course, as represented (rather paradoxically) by con-man Robert Preston, doing his charmingly shifty *Music Man* act.

The movie is as forgettable as yesterday's breakfast, so the details are a bit hazy in the mind, but things get very complicated. Seems that Earth is not a *bona fide* place to get recruits, so our trigger-happy hero not all that reluctantly packs it in (having discovered that electronic games and the Real Thing have different adrenaline counts) and goes home. But in the meantime the enemy has marked him as a potential menace and tracks him back to Earth, where he has to cope not only with assassination attempts,

but also the android duplicate that has been put in his place. Needless to say, he eventually takes the bit between his teeth and goes on to glory.

It's adolescent Walter-Mitty time, of course, but cheerful, good-natured fun that doesn't ever quite insult the intelligence, helped by likable characters giving likable performances. The subplot, of the android duplicate coping with the peculiar manners and mores of humanity, is almost worth a movie in itself.

VIDEO

Brainstorm (MGM/UA) is a real mess of a movie, though that can't be blamed on its idea, which is unoriginal but promising. It's the old breakthrough-invention and its immediate effects on its discoverers and its potential effects on society (again, shades of H.G. Wells!). In this case, it's another old standby, the machine that records one person's experiences and plays them back in another person's head.

Some good actors wrestle with a totally incoherent script and lose ignominiously. For instance, no distinction is made in the device's recording of sensory experience (which is what it starts out doing) as opposed to recording memories, emotions, and thoughts, which is what it suddenly shifts to doing. And communicating

this sort of total experience on a movie screen is a problem, not very neatly solved — the actors sit with a machine on their heads and a vacant look on their faces while we, the audience, are shown some thrilling movie shots, supposedly what the actors are experiencing. Total confusion results, since sometimes the recordings are from the subject's viewpoint, sometimes *outside* the subject. Is it too much to ask the people making science-fiction movies these days simply to be consistent, coherent, and logical? Or is it always going to be the old, familiar attitude: "It's science fiction. It doesn't have to make sense"?

This applies also to the metaphysical mush which concludes the whole mess, as a character experiences a recoding made by a dying person and is wafted into a glitzy realm of shining spheres, heavenly voices on the sound track, and a storm of what looks like moths straight out of the closet which is supposedly meant to suggest the angelic host. This tendency to mix SF with simple-minded mysticism is another pervasive and deplorable trend in today's movies, reflecting something really unhealthy going on in the audience's mind.

All in all, *Brainstorm* is the perfect example of the worst in sci-fi movies (and I use the term *sci-fi* quite deliberately).

✕



PLOT TEMPLATE

We came upon the (planet, comet, moon),
And landed on it (just in time, too soon),
For we were low on (water, pizza, gas):
The crew all shouted, "(Yea!, So what?, Alas!)"

We grounded on a (mountain, desert, plain)
Where there was too much (lava, dust, blue rain):
The atmosphere was (methane, hot, just right);
We vowed to stay there (always, for a year, one night).

We built a sturdy (treehouse, campsite, fort)
To guard ourselves 'gainst (beasties, natives, Gort),
Sent parties out for (girls, fresh water, food) —
For we were feeling (hungry, thirsty, lewd) —
And settled down to (party, study, brood).

At dawn we spied a (temple, city, ruin),
And planned to scout it (later, now, real soon) —
But then the (monsters, pirates, giant face)
Came down from out of (orbit, Yonkers, space)!


Attack! they sought our (fuel stores, tool kit, lives);
We fought them with our (arrows, blasters, knives)
Till we were down to (fifty, twenty, six),
And knew it was a (slaughter, pretty fix) —

'Til *other* (starships, saucers, Space Marines)
Did blast our foes to (pieces, smithereens),
And all ran red with (ichor, plasma, gore).
They said they came from (Deneb, Mars, the Core),
And swore we were (their allies, friends, a bore).

And so —

We pledged to fight (crime, Death, inflation),
And joined the (Empire, Federation)!

— Wil Creveling

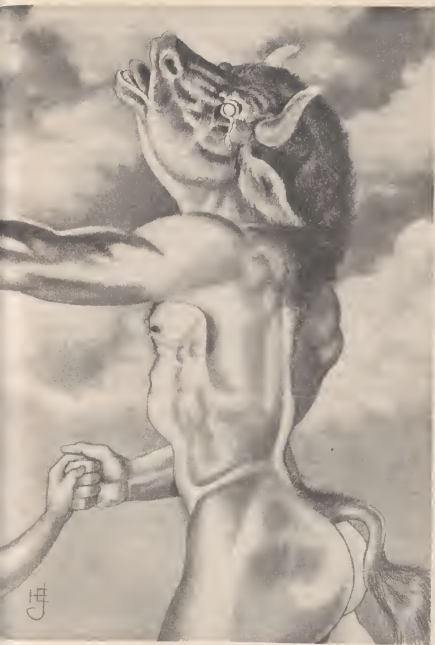
An illustration in the upper left corner shows a man's face with a wide-eyed, intense expression, wearing a dark cap. His hands are visible, one holding a string of three small bells. In the upper right, another hand is shown reaching out, with a string of three larger bells hanging from it. The background is a light, textured grey.

THE BLIND MINOTAUR

MICHAEL
SWANWICK 

Art: Hank Jankus





It was late afternoon when the blinded Minotaur was led through the waterfront. He cried openly, without shame, lost in his helplessness.

The sun cast shadows as crisp and black as an obsidian knife. Fisherfolk looked up from their nets or down from the masts of their boats, mild sympathy in their eyes. But not pity; memory of the Wars was too fresh for that. They were mortals and not subject to his tragedy.

Longshoremen stepped aside, fell silent at the passing of this shaggy, bull-headed man. Offworld tourists stared down from their restaurant balconies at the serenely grave little girl who led him by the hand.

His sight stolen away, a new universe of sound, scent, and touch crashed about the Minotaur. It threatened to swallow him up, to drown him in its complexity.

There was the sea, always the sea, its endless crash and whisper on the beach and quicker irregular slap at the docks. The sting of salt on his tongue. His calloused feet fell clumsily on slick cobblestones; and one staggered briefly into a shallow puddle, muddy at its bottom, heated piss-warm by the sun.

He smelled creosoted pilings, exhaust fumes from the great shuttles belching skyward from the Starport, a horse sweating as it clipclopped by, pulling a groaning cart that reeked of the day's catch. From a nearby garage, there was the **snap** and ozone crackle of an arc-welding rig. Fishmongers' cries and the creaking of pitchstained tackle overlaid rattling silverware from the terrace cafés, and fan-vented air rich with stews and squid and grease. And, of course, the flowers the little girl — was she really his daughter? — held crushed to her body with one arm. And the feel of her small hand in his, now going slightly slippery with sweat, but still cool, yes, and innocent.

This was not the replacement world spoken of and promised to the blind. It was chaotic and bewildering, rich and contradictory in detail. The universe had grown huge and infinitely complex with the dying of the light, and had made him small and helpless in the process.

The girl led him away from the sea, to the shabby buildings near the city's hot center. They passed through an alleyway between crumbling sheetbrick walls — he felt their roughness graze lightly against his flanks — and through a small yard ripe with fermenting garbage. The Minotaur stumbled down three wooden steps and into a room that smelled of sad, ancient paint. The floor was slightly gritty underfoot.

She walked him around the room. "This was built by expatriate Centaurimen," she explained. "So it's laid out around the kitchen in the center, *my* space to this side —" She let go of him briefly, rattled a vase, adding her flowers to those he could smell as already present, took his hand again. "— and yours to this side."

He let himself be sat down on a pile of blankets, buried his head in his

arms while she pattered about, raising a wall, laying out a mat for him under the window. "We'll get you some cleaner bedding in the morning, okay?" she said. He did not answer. She touched a cheek with her tiny hand, moved away.

"Wait," he said. She turned, he could hear her. "What — what is your name?"

"Yarrow," she said.

He nodded, curled about himself.

By the time evening had taken the edge off the day, the Minotaur was cried out. He stirred himself enough to strip off his loincloth and pull a sheet over himself, and tried to sleep.

Through the open window the night city was coming to life. The Minotaur shifted as his sharp ears picked up drunken laughter, the calls of street-walkers, the wail of jazz saxophone from a folk club, and music of a more contemporary nature, hot and sinful.

Censors, heavy with foxmyrrh, hovered over him as he tossed and turned, kicking off the crisp sheet (it was linen, and it had to be white), agonized, remembering similar nights when he was whole.

The city called to him to come out and prowl, to seek out women who were heavy and slatternly in the *tavernas*, cool and crisp in white, gazing out from the balconies of their husbands' *casavillas*. But the power was gone from him. He was no longer that creature that, strong and confident, had quested into the night. He twisted and turned in the warm summer air.

One hand moved down his body. The other joined it. Squeezing tight his useless eyes, he conjured up women who had opened to him, coral-pink and warm, as beautiful as orchids. Tears rolled down his shaggy cheeks.

Later he dreamed of being in a cool white *casavilla* by the sea, salt breeze wafting in through open windowspaces. He knelt at the edge of a bed and wonderingly lifted the sheet — it billowed slightly as he did — from his sleeping lover. Crouching before her naked body, his face was gentle as he marveled at her beauty.

It was strange to wake to darkness. For a time he was not even certain he was awake. And this was a problem, this unsureness, that would haunt him for all his life. Today, though, it was comforting to think it all a dream, and he wrapped the uncertainty around himself like a cloak.

The Minotaur found a crank recessed into the floor, and lowered the wall. He groped his way to the kitchen, and sat by the cookfire.

"You killed the snake three times last night," Yarrow said. "I could hear you." He imagined that her small eyes were staring at him accusingly. But apparently not, for she took something from the fire, set it before him, and innocently asked, "When are you going to get your eyes replaced?"

The Minotaur felt around for the platedough, and broke off a bit from the edge. "Immortals don't heal," he mumbled. He dipped the fragment into the paste she ladled onto the dough's center, stirred it about, let the bread drop. "New eyes would be rejected, didn't your mother tell you that?"

She chose not to answer. "While you were asleep, a newshawk came snooping around with that damned machine grafted to his shoulder. I told him he had the wrong place." Then, harshly, urgently, "Why won't they just leave you *alone*?"

"I'm an immortal," he said. "I'm not supposed to be left alone." Her mother really *should* have explained all this, if she was really what she claimed to be. Perhaps she wasn't; he would have sworn he had never bedded another of his kind, had in fact scrupulously avoided doing so. It was part of the plan of evasion that had served him well for so many years, and yet ended with his best friend dying in the sand at his feet.

Yarrow put some fragment of foodstuff in his hand, and he automatically placed it in his mouth. It was gummy and tasteless, and took forever to disappear. She was silent until he swallowed, and then asked, "Am I going to die?"

"What kind of question is that?" he asked angrily.

"Well, I just thought — my mother said that I was an immortal like her, and I thought . . . Isn't an immortal supposed to be someone who never dies?"

He opened his mouth to tell her that her mother should be hung up by her hair — and in that instant the day became inarguably, inalterably *real*. He wanted to cling to the possibility that it was all a dream for just a while longer, but it was gone. Wearily, he said, "Yarrow, I want you to go get me a robe. And a stick" — he raised a hand above his head — "so high. Got that?"

"Yes, but — "

"Go!"

A glimmering of his old presence must have still clung to him, for the child obeyed. The Minotaur leaned back, and — involuntarily — was flooded with memories.

He was young, less than a year released from the creche by gracious permission of the ministries of the Lords. Filled with controlling hormones and bioprogramming, he was sent out to stir up myth. The Wars were less than a year away, but the Lords had no way of knowing that — the cabarets were full, and the starlanes swollen with the fruits of a thousand remarkable harvests. There had never been such a rich or peaceful time.

The Minotaur was drunk, and at the end of his nightly round of bars. He had wound up in a *taverna* where the patrons removed their shirts to dance and sweet-smelling sweat glistened on their chests. The music was fast and heavy and sensual. Women eyed him as he entered, but could not politely approach him, for he still wore his blouse.

He bellied up to the bar, and ordered a jarful of the local beer. The barkeep frowned when he did not volunteer money, but that was his right as an immortal.

Crouched on their ledge above the bar, the musicians were playing hot and furious. The Minotaur paid them no attention. Nor did he notice the Harlequin, limbs long and impossibly thin, among them, nor how the Harlequin's eyes followed his every move.

The Minotaur was entranced by the variety of women in the crowd, the differences in their movements. He had been told that one could judge how well a woman made love by how well she danced, but it seemed to him, watching, that there must be a thousand styles of making love, and he would be hard put to choose among them, were the choice his.

One woman with flashing brown feet stared at him, ignoring her partner. She wore a bright red skirt that flew up to her knees when she whirled around, and her nipples were hard and black. He smiled in friendly cognizance of her glance, and her answering grin was a razor-crisp flash of teeth that took his breath away, a predatory look that said *You're mine tonight*.

Laughing, the Minotaur flung his shirt into the air. He plunged into the dancers and stooped at the woman's feet. In a rush he lifted her into the air, away from her partner, one hand closing about her ankles, the other supporting her by the small of her back. She gasped, and laughed, and balanced herself, so that he could remove one hand and lift her still higher, poised with one foot on the palm of his great hairy hand.

"I am strong!" he shouted. The crowd — even the woman's abandoned partner — cheered and stamped their feet. The Harlequin stepped up the band. The woman lifted her skirts and kicked her free leg high, so that one toe grazed the ceiling beams. She threw her head back and laughed.

The dancers swirled about them. For a single pure moment, life was bright and full and good. And then . . .

A touch of cool air passed through the crowd. A chance movement, a subtle shifting of colors brought the Minotaur's eyes around to the door. A flash of artificial streetlight dazzled and was gone as the door swung shut.

The Woman entered.

She was masked in silver filigree, and her breasts were covered. Red silk washed from shoulder to ankle, now caressing a thigh, now releasing it. Her eyes were a drenched, saturated green. She walked with a sure and sensual authority, knowing the dancers would part for her. No one could mistake her for a mortal.

The Minotaur was stunned. Chemical and hormonal balances shifted in preparation for the bonding to come. Nerveless, his arms fell to his sides. With an angry squawk, the woman he had hoisted into the air leapt, arms waving, to avoid falling. The Minotaur did not notice. He stepped forward, eyes wide and helpless, toward the immortal.

The silver mask headed straight for him. Green eyes mocked, challenged,

promised.

Behind him, unnoticed, the Harlequin slipped to the floor. He wrapped long fingers lovingly around a length of granite pipe, and brought it down, fast and surprisingly forcefully, into the back of the Minotaur's neck.

Bright shards of light flashed before the Minotaur's eyes. The dance floor washed out and faded to white. He fell.

At the Minotaur's direction, Yarrow led him out to the bluffs on the outskirts of the city. There was a plaza there, overlooking the ocean. He sent the child away.

Though his every bone protested, he slowly crouched, and then carefully spread out a small white cloth before him. He was a beggar now.

Salt breezes gusted up from the ocean, and he could feel the cobalt sky above, and the cool cumulus clouds that raced across the sun. There were few passersby, mostly dirt farmers who were not likely to be generous. Perhaps once an hour a small ceramic coin fell on his cloth.

But that was how he preferred it. He had no interest in money, was a beggar only because his being demanded a role to play. He had come to remember, and to prepare himself for death by saying farewell to the things of his life.

Times had changed. There was a stone altar set in the center of this very plaza where children had been sacrificed. He had seen it himself, the young ones taken from their homes or schooling-places by random selection of the cruel Lords. They had shrieked like stuck pigs when the gold-masked priests raised their bronze knives to the noonday sun. The crowds were always large at these events. The Minotaur was never able to determine whether the parents were present or not.

This was only one of the means the Lords had of reminding their subjects that to be human was often painful or tragic.

"Let's not sleep the day away, eh? Time to start rehearsing."

The Minotaur awoke to find himself sprawled on the wooden floor of a small caravan. The Harlequin, sitting cross-legged beside him, thrust a jar of wine into his hand.

Groggily, the Minotaur focused his eyes on the Harlequin. He reached for the man's neck. Only to find one hand taken up by the winejar. He squinted at it. The day was already hot, and his throat as dry as the Severna. His body trembled from the aftereffects of its raging hormonal storm. He lifted the wine to his lips.

Chemical imbalances shifted, found a new equilibrium.

"Bravo!" The Harlequin hauled the Minotaur to his feet, clapped him on the back. "We'll be famous friends, you and I. With luck, we may even keep each other alive, eh?"

It was a new idea to the Minotaur, and a disquieting, perhaps even blas-

phemous one. But he grinned shyly, and dipped his head. He *liked* the little fellow. "Sure," he said.

The sun was setting. The Minotaur felt the coolness coming off of the sea, heard the people scurrying to their homes. He carefully tied the ceramics into his cloth, and knotted it onto his belt. He stood, leaning wearily on his staff. Yarrow had not yet come for him, and he was glad; he hoped she had gone off on her own, forgotten him, left him behind forever. But the city's rhythms demanded that he leave, though he had nowhere to go, and he obeyed.

He went down into the city, taking the turns by random whim. He could not be said to be lost, for one place was as good as another to him.

It was by mistake, though, that he found himself in a building whose doors were never shut, whose windows were not shuttered. He had entered, thinking the way yet another alley. No doors barred progress down halls or into rooms. Still, he felt closed in. The corridors smelled — there was the male stench and the female; and intermingled with them, almost overpowering, an insect smell, the odor of something large and larval.

He stopped. Things stirred about him. There was the pat of bare feet on stone, the slow breathing of many people and — again — a sluggish movement of creatures larger than anything smelling thus should be. People were gathering; twelve, eighteen, more. They surrounded him. He could tell they were all naked, for there was not the whisper of cloth on cloth. Some walked as if they had almost forgotten how. In the distance, he thought he could hear someone *crawling*.

"Who are you?" Panic touched him lightly: sourceless, pure.

"Whrrrarrwr," began one of the people. He stopped, swallowed, tried again. "Why are you in the Hive?" His voice sounded forced, as if he were unused to speech. "Why are you here? You are a creature of the old days, of the Lords. This is no place for you."

"I took a wrong turn," the Minotaur said simply. Then, when there was no reply. "Who are you people? Why do you cohabit with insects?"

Someone coughed and sputtered and made hacking noises. A second joined her, making the same sounds, and then others, and yet more. With a start, the Minotaur realized they were laughing at him. "Is it religious or political?" he demanded. "Are you seeking transcendence?"

"We are trying to become victims," the speaker said. "Does *that* help you understand?" He was growing angry. "How can we explain ourselves to you, Old Fossil? You never performed a free act in your life."

Some whim, then, of internal chemistry made him want these strangers, these creatures, to understand him. It was the same compulsion that had forced him to empty himself to the newshawks before Yarrow appeared to lead him out of the arena.

"I had a friend, another immortal," the Minotaur said. "Together, we

cheated the patterning instinct by making our own pattern, a safe, strong one, we were like" — his short, powerful fingers joined, closing around the staff, intermeshing — "like *this*, you see. And it worked, it worked for years. It was only when our predators worked *within* the patterns we formed that we were destroyed." The words gushed out, and he trembled as the hormones that might give him the power to explain *almost* keyed in.

But the communards did not want to understand. They closed in on him, their laughter growing sharper, with more of a bark, more of a bite to it. Their feeble footsteps paltered closer, and behind them the chitinous whine grew louder, was joined by that of more insects, and more, until all the world seemed to buzz. The Minotaur flinched back.

And then they seemed to hesitate in confusion. They milled about uncertainly for a moment, then parted, and quick, small footsteps passed through them, ran to his side. A cool, smooth hand took his.

"Come home with me," Yarrow said. And he followed.

He dreamed of the arena that night, of the hot white sands underfoot that drank up his friend's blood. The Harlequin's body lay limp at his feet, and the bronze knife was as heavy as guilt in his hands.

He trembled in aftershock as the programming chemicals cut off. The world blazed up around him, as if his eyes had just opened and he were seeing clearly for the first time. He stared at the encircling bleachers, and every detail burned into his brain.

The people were graceful and well-dressed; they might almost have been the old Lords, deposed these many years ago in violent public revulsion. The Woman sat ringside. Her silver mask rested lightly on the lip of the white limestone wall, beside a small bowl of orange ices. She held a spoon in her hand, cocked lightly upward.

The Minotaur stared into her blazing green eyes, and read in them a fierce triumph, an obscene gloating, a very specific and direct lust. She had hunted him out of hiding, stripped him of his protection, and chivvied him into the open. She had forced him to rise to his destiny. To enter the arena.

Try though he might, the Minotaur could not awaken. If he had not known all this to be a dream, he would have gone mad.

Waking, he found himself already dressed, the last bit of breakfast in his hand. He dropped it, unnerved by this transition. Yarrow was cleaning the kitchen walls, singing an almost tuneless made-up song under her breath.

"Why aren't you out being taught?" he demanded, trying to cover over his unease with words. She stopped singing. "Well? Answer me!"

"I'm learning from you," she said quietly.

"Learning what?" She did not answer. "Learning how to tend to a cripple? Or maybe how a beggar lives? Hey? What could you possibly learn from me?"

She flung a wet cloth to the floor. "You won't tell me anything," she cried. "I ask you and you won't tell me."

"Go home to your mother," he said.

"I can't." She was crying now. "She told me to take care of you. She said not to come back until my task was done."

The Minotaur bowed his head. Whatever else she might or might not be, the mother had the casual arrogance of an immortal. Even he could be surprised by it.

"Why won't you tell me anything?"

"Go and fetch me my stick."

Bleak plains dominated the southern continent, and the Minotaur came to know them well. The carnival worked the long route, the four-year circuit of small towns running up the coast and then inland to the fringes of the Severna Desert.

Creeping across the plains, the carnival was small, never more than eight hands of wagons and often fewer. But when the paper lanterns had been lit, the fairway laid out, the holographic-woven canvases blazing neon-bright, they created a fantasy city that stretched to the edge of forever.

The Minotaur grunted. Muscles glistening, he bent the metal bar across his chest. Portions of the audience were breathing heavily.

It was the last performance of the evening. Outside the hot, crowded tent, the fairgoers were thinning, growing quieter. The Minotaur was clad only in a stained white loincloth. He liked to have room to sweat.

Applause. He threw the bar to the stage and shouted: "My last stunt! I'll need five volunteers!" He chose the four heaviest, and the one who blushed most prettily. Her he helped up on the stage, and set in the middle of the lifting bench, a pair of hefty *bouergers* to either side.

The Minotaur slid his head under the bench. His face emerged between the young woman's legs, and she shrieked and drew them up on the bench. The audience howled. He rolled his eyes, flared his nostrils. And indeed, she *did* have a pleasant scent.

He dug into the stage with naked toes, placed his hands carefully. With a grunt, the Minotaur lifted the bench a handsbreadth off the floor. It wobbled slightly, and he shifted his weight in compensation. A surge — he was crouching.

Sweat poured down the Minotaur's face and ran in rivulets from his armpits. The tent was saturated with the sweet smell, redolent with his pheromones. He felt a light touch on his muzzle. The woman on the bench had reached down to caress his nose with quick, shy fingertips. The Minotaur quirked a half-grin on one side of his mouth.

By the tent flap, the Harlequin lounged on a wooden crate, cleaning his toenails with a knife. They had a date with a sculptor in town after the show.

The Minotaur awoke suddenly, reached out and touched the cloth laid out before him. There was nothing on it, though he distinctly remembered having heard ceramics fall earlier. He swept his hands in great arcs in the dust, finding nothing.

Snickers and derisive jeers sounded from the stone in the plaza's center. Small feet scurried away — children running to deliver the swag to their masters. "Little snots," the Minotaur grumbled. They was an ever-present nuisance, like sparrows. He fell back into his daydreaming.

The sculptor had had stone jugs of wine sent up. By orgy's end they were empty, and the women lay languid on the sheets of their couches. They all stared upwards, watching the bright explosions in space, like slow-blossoming flowers. "What do they hope to accomplish, these rebels?" the Minotaur asked wonderingly. "I can see no pattern to their destruction."

"Why should a man like you — a *real* man — look any higher than his waist?" the sculptor asked coarsely. He laid a hand on the Minotaur's knee. His lady of the moment laughed throatily, reached back over her head to caress his beard.

"I'd just like to know."

The Harlequin had been perched on the wall. He leapt down now, and tossed the Minotaur his clothes. "Time we went home," he said.

The streets were dark and still, but there were people in the shadows, silently watching the skies. The sidestreet cabarets were uncharacteristically crowded. They stopped in several on their way back to the carnival.

The Minotaur was never sure at exactly what point they picked up the woman with skin the color of orange brick. She was from offworld, she said, and needed a place to hide. Her hands were calloused and beautiful from work. The Minotaur liked her strong, simple dignity.

Back at the carnival, the Harlequin offered their wagon, and the woman refused. The Minotaur said that he would sleep on the ground, it didn't bother him, and she changed her mind.

Still, he was not surprised when, some time later, she joined him under the wagon.

The sun hot on his forehead, the Minotaur again dreamed of the arena. He did not relive the murder — that memory had been driven from his mind, irretrievably burned away, even in dream. But he remembered the killing rage that drove the knife upward, the insane fury that propelled his hand. And afterwards he stood staring into the Woman's eyes.

Her eyes were as green as oceans, and as complex, but easy to read for all that. The lusts and rages, the fears and evil, grasping desire that had brought them all to this point — they were all there, and they were . . . insignificant. For the true, poisoned knowledge was that she was lost in her own chemical-hormonal storm, her body trembling almost imperceptibly, all-

but-invisible flecks of foam on her lips. She had run not only him, but herself as well, to the blind end of a tangled and malignant fate. She was as much a puppet to her programming as he or the Harlequin. All this he saw in a single lucid instant of revulsion.

There, on the burning sands, he tore out his eyes.

The newshawks vaulted the fence to get at him. His drama completed, he was fair game — for it *might* be he had fulfilled his true purpose and become that one out of a thousand immortals whose patterning instinct formed a new, a true and real myth.

They probed, scanned, recorded — *prodded* to find the least significant detail of a story that *might* be told over campfires a thousand years hence, in theatrical productions on worlds not yet discovered, in uninvented media, or simply be remembered in times of stress. Trying to get in on a story that might have meaning to the human race as it grew away from its homeworld, forgot its origins, expanded and evolved and changed in ways that could not be predicted.

They questioned the Minotaur for hot, grueling hours. The corpse of his friend began to rot, or perhaps that was only olfactory hallucination, a side effect of his mind telling his body that it had no further purpose. He felt dizzy and without hope, and he *could not* express his grief, *could not* cry, *could not* scream or rage or refuse their questions or even move away until they were done with him.

And then a cool hand slipped into his, and tugged him away. A small voice said, "Come home, Papa," and he went.

Yarrow was screaming. The Minotaur awoke suddenly, on his feet and slashing his stick before him, back and forth in pure undirected reaction. "Yarrow!" he cried.

"No!" the child shrieked in anger and panic. Someone slapped her face so hard she fell. The sound echoed from the building walls. "Pigs!" she raged from the ground.

The Minotaur lurched toward her, and someone tripped him up, so that he crashed onto the road. He heard a rib crack. He felt a trickle of blood from one nostril. And he heard laughter, the laughter of madwomen. And under that he heard the creaking of leather harness, the whirring of tiny pumps, the metal snicks of complex machinery.

There was no name for them, these madwomen, though their vice was not rare. They pumped themselves full of the hormone drugs that had once been the exclusive tools of the Lords, but they used them randomly, to no purpose. Perhaps — the Minotaur could not imagine, did not care — they enjoyed the jolts of power and importance, of sheer godlike caprice.

He was on his feet. The insane ones — there were three, he could tell by their sick laughter — ignored him. "What are you doing?" he cried. "Why

are you doing it?" They were dancing, arms linked, about the huddled child. She was breathing shallowly, like a hypnotized animal.

"Why?" asked the one. "Why do you ask why?" and convulsed in giggles.

"We are all frogs!" laughed the second.

Yarrow lay quietly now, intimidated not so much by the woman's hyper-adrenal strength as by the pattern of victim laid out for her. There were microtraces of hormones in the air, leaks from the chemical pumps.

"She has interesting glands," said the third. "We can put their secretions to good use."

The Minotaur roared and rushed forward. They yanked the stick from his hand and broke it over his head. He fell against the altar stone, hard, nearly stunning himself.

"We need to use that stone," said a madwomen. And when he did not move away, said, "Well, we'll wait."

But again the Minotaur forced himself to stand. He stepped atop the stone. Something profound was happening deep within him, something beyond his understanding. Chemical keys were locking into place, hormones shifting into balance. Out of nowhere his head was filled with eloquence.

"Citizens!" he cried. He could hear the people at their windows, in their doorways, watching and listening, though with no great interest. They had not interfered to save Yarrow. The Lords would have interfered, and human society was still in reaction to the rule of the Lords. "Awake! Your freedom is being stolen from you!"

A lizard, startled, ran over the Minotaur's foot, as quick and soft as a shiver. The words poured from him in a cold fever, and he could hear the householders straighten, lean forward, step hesitantly out onto the cobblestones. "No one is above you now," he shouted. "But I still see the dead hands of the Lords on your shoulders."

That got to them — he could smell their anger. His throat was dry, but he dared not spare the time to cough. His head was light, and a cool breeze stirred his curls. He spoke, but did not listen to the words.

Yarrow was lost, somewhere on the plaza. As he spoke, the Minotaur listened for her, sniffed the air, felt for vibrations through the stone — and could not find her. "Inaction is a greater tyrant than error ever was!" he cried, listening to heads nodding agreement with the old, familiar homily. He could hear the frantic, hopping motions the madwomen made, forward and back again, baffled and half-fascinated by the hormones he was generating, by the cadences and odd rhythms of his words.

The speech was a compulsion, and the Minotaur paid it no more mind than he did to the sliding of muscles under skin that went into his gestures, some wide and sweeping, others short and blunt. A whiff of girlish scent finally located Yarrow, not two armlengths away, but he could not go to

her. The words would not release him, not until he had spoken them all.

And when, finally, he lowered his arms, the plaza was filled with people, and the madwomen's harnesses had been ripped from them, the drug pumps smashed underfoot, their necks snapped quickly and without malice.

He turned to Yarrow, offered his hand. "Come," he said. "It's time to go home."

The Minotaur lay belly-down on the earth under the wagon. He stared down his muzzle at a slice of early-morning sky framed by two wheel spokes. The clouds of energy were still slowly dissipating. "I'd love to go out there," he said. "To see other worlds."

The orange-skinned woman scratched him above the ears, at the base of his small, ivory horns. Her hands were strong and sure. "They couldn't refuse you passage. What's stopping you?"

He nodded upward. "He gets sick — I'd have to go alone."

A triceratops beetle crept laboriously past his nose. He exhaled sharply, trying to turn it over, failed. "You two are inseparable, aren't you?" the woman asked.

The beetle was getting away. He snorted sharply again, twice. "I guess."

"Won't he be upset that I chose you over him?"

It took the Minotaur a moment to puzzle out her meaning. "Ah! You mean — I see. Good joke, very good joke!" He laughed without taking his eyes away from the beetle, watched it escape into the grass. "No, the Harlequin doesn't know that women are important."

It did not take long to gather belongings: The Minotaur had none and Yarrow few. "You can find your mother?" he asked her. They left the door open behind them, an old Centaurimen custom at final partings.

"I can always find my mother," Yarrow said.

"Good." Still, he did not let her go. He led her by the hand back along the waterfront. There, among the sounds and smells, the subliminal tastes and touches that had grown familiar to him, he leaned forward to kiss her tenderly on the cheeks and forehead.

"Good-bye," he said. "I am proud that you are my daughter."

Yarrow did not move away. There was a slight tremble in her voice when she spoke. "You still haven't *told* me anything."

"Ah," the Minotaur said. For a moment he was silent, mentally cataloging what she would need to know. The history of the Lords, to begin with. Their rise to power, how they had shaped and orchestrated the human psyche, and why they thought the human race had to be held back. She needed to know of the creches, of their bioprogramming chemicals, and of those immortals released from them who had gone on to become legend. She needed to know everything about the immortals, in fact, for the race had

been all but exterminated in the Wars. And how the Lords had endured as long as they had. How their enemies had turned their toys against them. All the history of the Wars. It would not be a short telling.

"Sit down," he commanded. There, in the center of the thoroughfare, he sat, and Yarrow followed.

The Minotaur opened his mouth to speak. At the sound of his words, resonant and deep, people would stop to listen for the briefest second . . . for just a moment longer . . . they would sit down in the road. The hormonal combinations that enforced strictest truth before the newshawks were to be in his voice, but combined with the strong eloquence of earlier in the day. He would speak plainly, with a fine parsimony of syllables. He would speak in strict accord with the ancient oratorical traditions. He would speak with tongues of fire.

The waterfront would fill and then overflow as people entered and did not leave, as they joined the widening circle of hushed listeners, as the fisherfolk came up from their boats and down from their masts, the boy prostitutes came out from the brothels, the offworld *tourista* joined with the kitchen help to lean over the edges of their terraces.

In future years this same telling, fined down and refined, elaborated and simplified, would become the epic that was to mark this age — *his* age — as great for its genesis. But what was to come in just a moment was only a first draft. A prototype. A seed. But it was to be beautiful and moving beyond all possible imagining of its listeners, for it was new, an absolutely new word, a clear new understanding. It was to sum up an age that most people did not realize was over.

"Listen," said the Minotaur.

He spoke.



If "Young New Writers" panels at conventions are any indication, a young, new writer in science fiction is anyone under forty who has been publishing in major magazines for less than fifteen years. Certainly Michael Swanwick is one of the most promising new writers to come along in some time. His claims to newness are better than average: he has only been publishing for about five years. His claims to talent are also exceptional: he had two stories on the Nebula Awards final ballot in his first year. He has been published in many mass-circulation slick magazines, in addition to the most prestigious science-fiction anthologies, such as New Dimensions. As for claims of youth, well, he is under forty. He is also married, and a Philadelphian.

THE MITTENS OF ULYSSES

"See," said Ulysses, showing his mittens,
"What a clever wench is my Penelope.
She doesn't sit in the corner and spin
The channel selector around the dial,
Not she. Her busy fingers ever knit
Sweaters and scarves for the family
And afghans for the bed. Our closet
Is a treasury of her domestic craft,
Each twist of yarn like a thought
Frozen in a wool eternity."

"And what thoughts do you think,
O proud Ulysses, these mittens of yours express?"
His mate inquired of the married man.

"They are memorials of our love and of,
As well, the deeds for which I won renown.
See here, this double-ax bespeaks
My visits to the realm of Crete. And this
Device of a single eye lanced by a spear
Signifies my victory over Polyphemus."

"And the skulls that are loomed
In the palm of each hand?"

Ulysses frowned. "I make it a policy
Never to speak of her suitors.
They've departed to their reward.
But when I welcome strangers so —"
He lifted his mittened hand to greet
The newly-risen moon. "— they know."
Ulysses smiled. "They know."

— Tom Disch

WHAT HAPPENED ON CRANBERRY ROAD

by Grania Davis

art: Frank Borth





**DO
NOT
EXIT**
**ONE WAY
TRAFFIC**

©BORTH '83

"Come on, get ready, we'll be late!" Jane Borchert hustled around her ranch-style house, getting the kids ready for soccer practice.

"Don't forget your jacket. It's chilly outside, looks like rain."

Jane flicked on the radio to get the weather and traffic reports. There was nothing at all on the dial but loud, buzzing static. Odd. The radio was working fine this morning — and they didn't need new repair bills right now.

"Did you remember to buy the juice and snacks for the break?" asked twelve-year-old Jenny. "It's our turn to bring juice and snacks."

"The juice, my God, I forgot the juice! We'll have to stop at Nicky's Market for a jug of apple juice."

"There won't be time to stop," whined gap-toothed, ten-year-old Ben. "If you stop at the store now there'll be a big line and we'll be late for practice, and the new coach is so tight. He says that anybody who's late for practice can't play in the first half of the game. And today was a half-day at school, so there's no excuse for being late."

"Okay, I'll drop you kids off at soccer practice, then I'll get the juice," sighed Jane. "We have to pick up Lorrie too. Did you tell her to be ready on time and wait outside?"

"I told her," said Jenny. "She'll be ready — if she didn't spend all afternoon jabbering on the phone."

"Call and remind her," said Ben.

Jenny tried to phone her friend, but the line buzzed and clicked strangely — then went dead. She tried again, but the line was still out of order. Odd.

"If she isn't ready we'll have to leave her," said Ben firmly.

Jane tied her long, curly brown hair into a low ponytail, slipped into a sweater and jeans, and dabbed on light lipstick. Then she wandered around the house, turning off lights and checking the locks on the big sliding windows that led to the large grassy back yard, with the weather-beaten swing set and the garden that always needed an extra day in the week for weeding and mowing, planting and pruning. The modest, low-ceilinged rooms with the slightly threadbare Early American furniture were organized for immediate departure.

Lights off, except the fluorescents in the bathrooms to fool burglars. Windows and doors all locked. Stove off in the roomy, disheveled kitchen where all household debris finally came to rest. Teddy Cat and Slurpy, the terrier mix, were both out in the back yard, already whining and scratching to get back in. Purse. Jackets. Umbrellas in case of rain. Money. Credit cards and auto-club card in case of breakdown. Keys. Lipstick, Kleenex, and comb.

Jane Borchert and her two children, sandy-haired, twelve-year-old Jenny with silver braces on her upper teeth, and blond, ten-year-old Ben left their house. They walked down the small pathway lined with pink

flowering rose bushes, and piled into the old, powder-blue Ford station wagon that Jane used to putter around the town.

With a tiny prayer she turned the ignition key, and was relieved when the engine started promptly. There was still another day of life left in the old Ford. She flicked on the radio, but again there was only noisy static. Very odd. Maybe some electrical disturbance was blocking their reception. She backed out of the carport and headed east on Cranberry Road, a winding suburban road with an attractive view of the wooded ridge on one side and the river below.

That's why the Borchers had originally bought this house — back when it was still possible for a middle-class family with a middle-class income to *afford* a house. They had looked at dozens of rambling tract houses in their price range, but they all seemed flat and dull, on level and homogeneous streets.

Then they had discovered the small, slightly run-down subdivision on Cranberry Road, with comfortable houses strung like a curving string of beads between the ridge and the river. There had been a house for sale on Cranberry Road. It was the right size and the right price, and in those days financing was readily available. So what if the shaggy beige wall-to-wall carpets were musty and stained, the yellow paint was peeling in places, and the roof needed some work? Rome wasn't built in a day, and the combination of a family neighborhood with a river and hillside view was irresistible. That was nine years ago, and the paint and carpets still hadn't been replaced — though the roof work was essential.

Jane drove the Ford along the familiar curves of Cranberry Road and admired the new green foliage of late spring. When summer came they could swim and paddle rubber rafts in the shallow pools of the river. This winter had been wet, so the river was still running swift and strong. It was a cloudy, drizzly afternoon.

Jane reached the intersection where Cranberry Road joined larger and busier Lee Mountain Road.

"That's odd," she said. Everything seemed odd today.

Up ahead at the intersection was a large, blinking red stoplight, and big, fresh yellow-and-black-arrow signs pointing back towards Cranberry Road, and a large new traffic sign saying:

Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.

Jane Borchers slowed, then came to a complete stop.

"That's weird," she said.

"What's the matter, Mom?" asked Jenny.

"These signs must be new," said Jane. "I knew they were planning some road work around here, but I don't see any reason for them to close off the whole intersection. That's really dumb. Now I'll have to go all the way back around the ridge to Ranbo Parkway. What a nuisance! And the radios aren't working either for traffic reports. They could have put up

warning notices, instead of just suddenly closing off the whole intersection like that."

Annoyed, Jane Borchert pulled into a driveway to make a U-turn, so she could return the same way she had come — as the large new signs so firmly directed.

She headed back along Cranberry Road, driving the curves a little faster than usual to make up for lost time. The blue Ford passed by their house, yellow paint still peeling, fence slightly sagging, overgrown garden always in need of more work.

She continued past the small neighborhood shopping center that contained Nicky's Market; Vic's drug and variety store; and Taste-Treet, a little coffee, snack, and burger shop that the kids loved.

They drove around the final curve that led to the big Ranbo Parkway intersection. Jane swore under her breath and came to a sudden stop. Up ahead was the same blinking red light, the same one-way arrow signs pointing back up Cranberry Road, and the same large new authoritative yellow and black sign:

Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.

"This is completely crazy!" cried Jane. "The road crews are bananas. They've closed off both ends of Cranberry Road and there's no way to get out! What the Hell should I do?"

"Mom!" cried Ben.

"The idiots at one end of the road don't know what's happening with the idiots at the other end of the road," muttered Jane. "And nobody bothers to communicate or find out what's happening. Typical city-hall bunglers. First they wait years to patch up the potholes in the road, then they botch up the whole job by sealing off both ends of the street. No wonder they can't handle world peace or urban crime if they can't even do a simple road job. Now what should I do? The signs down at Lee Mt. Road say **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic**. And the signs up here at Ranbo Parkway say the same thing. If I try to go on through I'll risk a moving violation — and our insurance company doesn't like that. I got in trouble over that left turn last August, and if I get more tickets they'll raise our rates — and Tom will murder me. But I can't sit here all day waiting for them to change the signs. The kids have a big game on Saturday, they can't be late to soccer practice. Lorrie is waiting and so is the juice."

"What's the matter, Mom?" asked Ben, fidgeting in the back seat. "Why are you just sitting here?"

"Didn't you notice?" snapped Jane. "The damn road crews closed off both ends of Cranberry Road. There's no way I can turn without risking a ticket."

"Why don't you just make the turn, then explain it if a cop sees you?" asked Jenny reasonably. "I'm sure they didn't do it on purpose. If we wait

for them to change the signs we'll be late!"

"You're probably right," sighed Jane, resigned to taking the risk. "The police never patrol around here — as I've mentioned at Town Council meetings. Even if someone sees me, they can't blame me for the road department's dumb mistakes."

Just then five big motorcycles roared and screeched to a halt beside the blue Ford. Jane glanced at them, annoyed. She hated bike gangs drag racing along the river. So noisy — and dangerous.

"What the Hell?" demanded a sullen, youthful voice within a globular metallic helmet. "They put up signs at this end too!"

"Jesus H. Christ," sneered another youth in his helmet and black leathers. "What scum holes! Can't they do anything right?"

"This is really screwed up," whined another biker in a tone of personal outrage. "How can they block off both ends of the street? How do they expect people to get out? What dumb-bones."

"Let's just go on through," said a big kid with a tense, hard face. "They can't expect us to sit on our buns here all day. If the heat stops us we'll just tell the truth. We're clean. They can't bust us for something like this."

The five tough-looking young punks in helmets and black leathers glanced over at Jane's Ford.

She waved to them tentatively and rolled down her window. "I'm stuck here too," she called nervously. "Isn't this dumb? You go ahead into the intersection and I'll follow. If any cops stop us we can all explain."

"Right," agreed the young bikers.

They gunned their engines and moved slowly towards the large, blinking red light, the yellow and black arrows pointing back towards Cranberry Road, and the big new sign that said **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.**

As they reached the red light, the motorcycle phalanx suddenly stopped. Jane slammed on her brakes to avoid rear-ending them.

"Jesus H. Christ!" cried the big biker in a shrill and aggrieved voice.

"What the Hell is this?" stammered the other.

Jane opened her window again and called out. "What's the matter? Why did you stop?"

"There's something here," one yelled back. "Like an invisible barrier. There's no way to go through. What is this?"

"They *could* be stoned, Mom," muttered Jenny from the back seat in a tone of haughty, twelve-year-old sophistication. "Why don't you go on past them?"

How quickly her daughter was losing her innocence, thought Jane. But she might be right. Young guys on motorcycles are usually stoned — on something. Jane edged past the motorcycles towards the red light.

Then she felt a soft pressure engulfing the front of the Ford. She put her foot down harder on the gas. The engine roared, but there was no way

— just no way she could move forward into the intersection. She backed up and tried again. Again she encountered the same gentle but unyielding pressure.

There was no way she could go forward. No way she could leave Cranberry Road. The arrows and the signs all directed her back the way she came — back to the other exit which was also closed off. **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic**, said the signs. And the signs apparently meant what they said. There was no way to leave Cranberry Road.

"What the Hell is this?" cried Jane.

"Let's try the other end," yelled the big biker in an angry, frustrated tone.

"Go on, I'll follow," called Jane.

So they turned around. The bikes roared off, and Jane backed the big wagon carefully around to trail after them. Once again they drove the winding curves of Cranberry Road, adorned with bright, late spring foliage. They passed the little shopping center and their rambling, run-down ranch-style home once again. The wooded ridge rose up on one side above them, and the swollen, tree-lined river swirled below. There were drizzly, turbulent clouds gathered overhead; and it looked like it might rain soon. But Jane wasn't too interested in the weather or the scenery. This was the second time they had driven the entire length of Cranberry Road today. They wouldn't ever make it on time to soccer practice now. Lorrie and the juice were still waiting. And that soft, ominous, unyielding pressure was weird. Really very weird.

By the time she reached the Lee Mt. intersection, she already had the answer to the question that settled like a knot in the pit of her stomach.

The five bikers were sitting just behind the blinking red light, their helmets off, and swearing loudly. Now that she could see their acne-ridden faces, they looked even younger than they sounded. Just angry, scared kids, really. How could their parents afford those big, shiny bikes when she could hardly afford their utility bill lately? Maybe the boys worked part-time jobs — something honest, she hoped.

She edged the Ford beside them. They didn't even look at her. They just sat there sullenly and swore. The big red light blinked on and off in an irritating way. The large yellow and black arrows pointed back towards Cranberry Road, and the big, new sign said **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic**.

Jane edged ahead slowly until she encountered the eerie, gentle, unyielding pressure. There was no way she could go ahead. No way to enter the intersection even though she could *see* it. There was some kind of strange, invisible barrier blocking off both ends of the street.

Something very weird. There was no way to leave Cranberry Road. "Let's go home and phone the cops," said Jane to her two kids.

* * *

"I really do love you, Annie. When we started this thing I was just fooling around, but my feelings have grown surprisingly intense."

"I know. I think about you all the time. I miss you and long for you. It's really crazy, Dick."

"But we must be careful — really careful. If anybody finds out about this there'll be big trouble for everybody."

"I know."

"I hate sneaking around like this, but it's the only way we can ever be together without making our families miserable."

"It's worth it, Dick. It's our secret world, just between you and me. I want us to last forever."

"Forever, Annie."

The two disheveled lovers sat on the rumpled queen-sized bed in the back of the white, wood-frame bungalow on Cranberry Road, clasped hands, and gazed wistfully into each other's eyes.

"I must leave now," said Dick, blond and muscular. "If my wife phones the office she'll wonder why I'm out to lunch so late."

"I know," nodded Annie, dark and petite. "I must get ready for the Cub Scout meeting — but I'll miss you."

"I *always* miss you," called back Dick, scooping up his clothes in one brawny arm and heading into the bathroom. "I miss you like crazy."

"Will I see you again soon?" asked Annie, pulling a flowered robe around her thin shoulders.

"I don't know," sighed Dick. "I never know when I can get away for a few hours. There are so many people watching. We must be so cautious so nobody gets hurt. I'll phone you as soon as I can. You understand, don't you?"

"Of course I understand! We're not irresponsible teenagers. Phone during the day — when John and the kids are out. I love to hear your voice."

The sound of the shower came from the bathroom, then Dick stepped out, dripping and ruddy, rubbing himself with a blue towel. He stroked Annie's cheek. "Hey, don't look so sad," he said with a warm smile. "You know I love you — whenever I can."

"I know," she smiled back at him wanly. "But I never know when — or if — I'll ever see you again."

"You're beautiful. I'll be back soon, I promise." Dick dressed carefully in his three-piece tweed suit, knotted his tie and combed his short blond hair.

The illicit lovers embraced one last, desperate time. Then Dick went out the back door — so he wouldn't be seen. Down an overgrown garden pathway to Cranberry Road. He furtively slipped into his beige Toyota, which was parked a little way up the road — so it wouldn't be noticed in front of Annie's house.

The Toyota started promptly; and Dick drove up Cranberry Road, past the white, wood-frame bungalow with the large oak trees on the lawn, where he could barely see Annie's shadow at the large picture window — watching him leave.

They'd been seeing each other for nearly a year now, irregularly, whenever they could grab a few hours together. Dick and Annie's husband worked as claims adjusters for the same insurance company. They had met at one of those silly office parties. When Dick and Annie first saw each other, something had just clicked. Dick knew many women at work, younger, more available, even prettier. But when he saw Annie something just clicked inside him, like he'd wanted her all his life. Later she confessed that she'd felt the same.

They began chatting by the big bowl of potato chips and cheese dip. Annie and her husband John had two boys, and she liked to take modern dance lessons in her spare time. She liked movies, especially deep, moody foreign films.

Dick and his blonde, bouncy wife Susie had an impish toddler daughter with curly blonde hair and big, blue eyes. Dick liked to go hiking in the woods; he liked decent white wine and old movies on cable TV. He also liked to dance.

They stood near the potato chips and talked about themselves and movies they'd both seen. They danced a couple of times. They didn't have that much in common, but something just clicked between them. Then they both realized they were spending too much time together — at a silly office party, so they drifted back to their spouses — whom they really and truly loved.

They met again that summer at a barbecue at the lavish home of a company veep. They clicked again. It was quite an unusual — and unmistakable attraction. It was a hot night and they wandered into the big garden, scented with summer jasmine.

Annie had stumbled in her too-high-heeled sandals that went so well with her summer party dress. He casually reached out a large, furry hand to steady her. She leaned towards him. His arm instinctively went around her shoulder and they embraced — and kissed. They both grew excited — and rather embarrassed. It was bad form to flirt at the veep's barbecue.

"Sorry," he murmured. "That rum punch was stronger than I thought."

"I know what you mean," she giggled.

They quickly rejoined the party and their delightful and attentive spouses. They were both happily married people. They shouldn't be kissing strangers like that!

But the excitement of the embrace wouldn't fade. Dick kept thinking about it, toying with the crazy memory. Finally he phoned her — just out

of curiosity, because he wanted to hear her voice again. He said he wanted to talk to John about some business — but why would he call John about business during the day?

She sounded very surprised, but glad to hear from him. He said he'd drop off some papers for John — he'd come by at lunch time if she didn't mind.

She spent the morning getting ready for his visit like a kid preparing for a date. She washed her hair, tidied up, and dressed in tight, attractive but casual jeans and a T-shirt. When he arrived they both knew why he was there. The business papers were forgotten.

By the time he left a few hours later, they both knew this was going to be better than they'd expected. Better than either one of them had the right to expect, since they were both very happily married — to other people.

At first it was just a game for both of them, some harmless fun, excitement and pleasure. Then their feelings deepened until it became vitally important to be together whenever possible — but it was even more important that they never get caught.

Dick Evans drove cheerfully down Cranberry Road, listening to vintage rock music on the Toyota's tape deck. This afternoon had been good. Very good. Annie was a warm, wonderful, beautiful woman. So was his wife Susie. It really was possible to love two women at once. Sure, why not? The Arabs and the Chinese had more than one wife. He would never take risks, chasing loose, unpredictable, disease-ridden women. But he wasn't made for 100% monogamy either. Nothing wrong with enjoying life's full share of pleasure — as long as nobody got hurt.

It was a beautiful day. The trees were covered with fresh new foliage, and the river raced below the wooded ridge. Some dark, drizzly clouds were in the sky; it might rain later. After the baby was tucked in her bed, he and Susie could have a cosy dinner, watch some T.V. and make love. Why shouldn't a man be happy — so long as he didn't get caught? Dick drove to the intersection of Cranberry Road and Lee Mountain Road.

"What the Hell?" he muttered under his breath.

Up ahead at the intersection was a large, blinking red stoplight, and a big, fresh, yellow-and-black-arrow sign pointing back towards Cranberry Road, and a large new traffic sign saying:

Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.

"What the Hell?" he said again. The highway department must have just put these up while he was at Annie's, for road work or something. No warning earlier at all. Damn, this would really delay him. Now he'd have to go all the way back to the other end of Cranberry Road.

Still it looked pretty quiet: no cops or traffic around at all. Maybe he'd just ease into the intersection, and if anyone tried to stop him he'd explain that he was confused by the new signs.

Dick Evans wasn't the sort of man to take many risks, but he was a man in a hurry. His little afternoon party was over and he wanted to get far away from Cranberry Road, far away from the inevitable aftermath of guilt. He wanted to get back to work, back to his family. He didn't want to get hung up driving suspiciously back and forth on Cranberry Road.

He'd risk it. Those new signs were very confusing; even the cops would understand that. Besides, there were never any police around here. Even Annie complained that she wished there were more patrols to slow down dragging teenagers.

Dick Evans eased his car up to the blinking stoplight at the intersection. Then he felt a slight thud and a soft, unyielding pressure enfold the front of the Toyota. He couldn't go forward. Weird. *Very weird*. Was this some new radar gadget dreamed up by the highway department?

Damn. Now he'd have to drive all the way back up Cranberry Road, all the way to Ranbo Parkway. Past Annie's white bungalow and her big, accusing, picture window. What if somebody saw him? Jesus, what a pain. Better hurry.

He swung the Toyota around — great little car, turns on a dime. He raced back along the curving roadway, not slowing as he passed Annie's house, pausing only to let a car out of the small, local shopping center.

He reached the Ranbo Parkway intersection and saw a small crowd gathered in cars, motorcycles, and pick-ups in front of a large, blinking, red stoplight. There was a big, fresh arrow sign pointing back towards Cranberry Road, and a large new yellow and black traffic sign saying: **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.**

"What the Hell!" cried Dick Evans, beginning to feel a low surge of panic.

He lowered his window and called to one of the tough looking kids on a motorcycle. "What's going on here?"

"Wish I knew," shrugged the sullen, acne-faced punk. "Might be some road construction, but the highway crews really screwed up. They set up an electric barrier, or some strange bull. Completely blocked off both ends of Cranberry Road."

Time seemed to congeal in a sickening way for Dick Evans, sitting in his beige Toyota with the rock music pounding, eager to get away from Cranberry Road and back to his ordinary routines. Time seemed to congeal like cold grease for Dick Evans — a man who liked to enjoy himself, but didn't like to take many risks.

Jane Borchers roared into her driveway, tires squealing irritably. She raced into the worn, yellow ranch house, her two kids trailing behind in their neat, red soccer uniforms with Nicky's Market emblems.

Jane grabbed the phone in the living room. The dial tone sounded normal. She glanced at the list of emergency numbers that were posted

for the kids and dialed the highway patrol. There was a brief series of clicks, buzzing static — then the line went dead.

“Damn! The phone’s not working either.”

“Try again, Mom,” whined Ben, acting just like a hyper and frustrated ten-year-old boy.

Jane lifted the receiver. Once again the dial tone was normal. She tried the highway patrol again. Once more there were clicks, static, then a dead line. She tried her husband Tom’s office. Maybe he could do something. The line clicked, buzzed, and went dead again. Jane felt something close to real fear. Nobody was hurt, but they were trapped and isolated. What was going on?

Just then the phone rang. Jane and the kids all gave tense, startled little shrieks of laughter. So the phone was working after all.

“Hello?”

It was Mrs. Sanford, their elderly, widowed, next-door neighbor. She’d just heard funny stories from some children on bicycles about the road being blocked up at both ends. Were the kids telling the truth?

“Yes,” said Jane. “It’s true, but don’t ask me to explain. Nobody’s hurt but it’s something weird, that’s all I know. Let me call you back. I’m having trouble with my phone and I want to check it.”

Jane dialed Mrs. Sanford’s number. The elderly woman promptly answered and continued pumping Jane for information.

“My phone is only working locally,” said Jane. “Why don’t you try the highway patrol and see if you can get through.”

Mrs. Sanford tried several times. She also tried the police, the sheriff, the mayor, and her friends on the town council. All she got was static and dead lines. She and Jane could get through to their neighbors up and down the block, but no further.

The phone lines were out beyond Cranberry Road.

Jane and the kids drove back to the Lee Mountain intersection. A sizable crowd had collected in cars and pick-ups, motorcycles and bikes, and on foot. Everybody had the same questions: What was this? Who put it there? What was going on?

There were many interesting theories, but nobody had any answers. They were all trapped together on Cranberry Road. Nobody knew why, and nobody knew how long the barrier would last.

“We should get some food while the store is still open,” said Jenny, always the practical member of the family.

“Good idea,” said Jane. She backed the Ford away from the milling, babbling crowd and headed back up the road towards the shopping center. The clouds were darker now, and a light rain was spattering the windshield. She flicked on the car radio, but there was only static. They were completely cut off.

Trying to ignore the gnawing waves of anxiety in her stomach, Jane

pulled the Ford into the shopping center. Apparently many people had the same idea, and the lot overflowed with honking cars and people with shopping carts like the day before a major holiday. People were eager to take action in the emergency — any action.

A van finally pulled out of a parking place and Jane slid in. She and the kids wandered aimlessly around Nicky's Market, randomly throwing vital staples into their cart: Lo-fat milk, wheatberry bread, eggs, cheddar cheese, diet Pepsi, hamburger meat and a cut-up fryer, frozen pizza, toilet paper, canned tuna, catfood for Teddy, their black and white tom, dog kibble, candles in case the electricity went, baggies, lettuce, carrots and apples from the produce department, cleanser, instant coffee, a six-pack of Budweiser, some cans of noodle soup, applesauce, cottage cheese, ketchup, corn flakes, chunky peanut butter, strawberry jam, butter, and a carton of rainbow sherbet.

"There, that should last us for a while," said Jane, continuing to ignore the anxiety that continued to gnaw at her belly. If they were really trapped how long would the supplies at Nicky's Market last? The crowds had already begun to deplete the fresh meat and produce, bread and dairy products. There were still lots of canned goods on the shelves, and the drugstore had a good stock of medicines and toiletries, but how long could this insane thing continue? Could any delivery trucks get through? Why did they experiment with a crazy new roadblock device here? What was happening?

They loaded their groceries into the back of the wagon. The rain was coming down harder now, already puddling the potholes in the parking lot. She let the kids get frosties at the snack bar while she sat in the Ford with her head in her hands, anxiety verging on panic, trying to figure this crazy thing out.

The kids returned to the car with dripping cones in their hands. They decided to drive back to the Ranbo Parkway intersection, to see what was happening there before it got too dark. There was a large, noisy mob at the intersection, milling around the unpleasantly monotonous, blinking red light.

"He should have been home an hour ago," said a large woman in a black sweat shirt and slacks. "He's never late like this."

"My son is late too," said a thin blonde woman with a tired, wrinkled face. "I don't think anybody can get in either."

"Do you realize that we haven't seen *any* cars or people on Ranbo Parkway since this thing started?" demanded a balding man in a plaid flannel shirt, chewing anxiously on his pipe. "Not one car, not one road repair truck, not one commuter or school kid trying to get back home. Not even the school bus! We can't get out — and nobody can get in. We're totally isolated."

"That probably isn't the real Ranbo Parkway we see out there," added

a grey-bearded man thoughtfully. "The parkway is always filled with commuter traffic this time of day. It just *looks* like the Parkway. It's some kind of illusion projected onto the barrier like TV."

"I wonder what this damn barrier *really* is and who really put it here," cried a sharp-faced woman. "Maybe it's a Russian weapon to trap people until they die. Maybe it's radioactive!"

That remark made a lot of people edge away from the stoplight, back a few yards up Cranberry Road.

"Maybe you're all full of bull," sneered a punk in black leathers on a big, flashy motorcycle. His little gang of clone buddies all guffawed.

"Hold your tongue, boy," growled the balding man.

"Hold my butt!" yelled a hard-faced punk.

The crowd began to mutter irritably, ready to focus all of their helpless anger and tension on the motorcycle gang, who were focusing all their own frustrated anger on the crowd. The five punks laughed, turned their bikes around, and roared, jeering, back up Cranberry Road.

"Your parents will hear about this!" hollered the balding man.

"I don't think they live here," said the large woman in the sweat shirt. "They wouldn't dare talk like that if they lived around here, and I don't recognize any of their faces. I think they were cutting school, joy-riding along the river."

"That's great," said the thin, tired blonde woman. "That means we're trapped here with those delinquents for however long this — thing lasts."

The crowd mumbled nervously.

"Better lock up tight tonight," growled a pot-bellied man with grease-stained hands. "Them kids'll be looking for food tonight, and shelter — and God knows what else."

A small, freckled, red-haired girl began to cry. "I want my daddy. Where is he?"

"Shhhh," said her plump, pretty young mother. "Daddy's still at work."

"Why isn't he home yet? It's nearly dark," whined the child. "He's always home before it gets dark."

"He had to work late tonight," said her mother with a worried frown.

Everyone looked worried, up-tight, and miserable. It was getting darker. Night was coming and the sinister barrier was still there. The red stoplight blinked with spooky regularity in the purple dusk. This creepy thing wouldn't end when night came. It would continue — for how long?

It was long past time for kids to come home from school and people to come home from work. Nobody had arrived. Nobody had phoned from outside or knocked at the wretched barrier. Not one son or daughter, husband or wife, friend or relative had entered Cranberry Road since midday, and not one person had been able to leave. There was no way to communicate with the outside. No phone connections, radio or TV, no

mail or afternoon papers had been delivered.

Jane felt the anxiety knot tighten in her stomach until she felt she might choke. It was time for Tom to come home from work. Her husband was already late and there was no sign of him. Where was he? What was happening? Maybe tomorrow they could climb out over the ridge — but it was too dark and muddy now.

Some people were weeping as the hopeless, helpless crowd began to disperse in the dark and the rain. The full, alarming impact of their situation was sinking in. Nobody knew what this thing was, how dangerous it was, or how long it would last.

They were trapped inside tonight with the limited supplies of the shopping center, a hostile motorcycle gang — and each other.

Dick Evans crept sheepishly to the back door of Annie's white wood-frame bungalow and knocked softly several times. Finally the door opened and Annie stood there in her flowered robe, long dark hair streaming down her shoulders. A look of surprise (with a touch of annoyance?) flooded her face.

"Dick!" she cried. "Darling, are you still here?"

"Regrettably, yes," he said. "Haven't you heard about the damn electronic barricades that have blocked the intersections? There's no way I can get out."

"Of course I heard about them," she said grimly. "There's no way I can get out either. The whole neighborhood is talking about nothing else. My boys haven't come home and neither has John. I've been all alone here with no radio or TV, and only neighborhood gossip and hysteria on the phone. I'm so glad to see you! Come in quickly so nobody notices. I thought you got out before this thing started."

"No, I literally ran into it after I left your house. I've been hanging around the intersection all afternoon, listening to your dumb neighbors, getting soaked in the rain, worrying myself sick — and hoping the damn thing would let up for a minute so I could get home. Jesus, Susie must be frantic. I always come home right after work, or phone if I'm delayed. She must think I'm hurt, and there's no way to contact her. If she finds out where I've been we're dead."

"You mean you and I are dead — or you and Susie?" asked Annie with a frown, taking his large hand and drawing him inside.

"You and me, Susie and John. All of us. Now there's no way to avoid getting caught. We're all dead."

"Sit down," said Annie. "Have a drink. We'll think of something. You can say you came here to deliver papers to John. Remember, you said that the first time you came here to see me."

"John will know there were no papers!" he snapped.

"Sit down and try to relax. We'll work on thinking up just the right

thing to say. Let me fix you a drink. You never have time to relax when you come in the afternoon. You always keep one eye on me and one eye on the clock. We never have time to just be together, to talk and enjoy each other's company. There's nobody else here, just you and me tonight. All alone together. I'm worried sick about John, the boys and that damn barricade; and you're worried about Susie and the baby, but there's nothing we can do except wait for this crazy thing to end. Perhaps it's a special gift for us, Dick: our chance to be together for a whole night. We've never done that before. I'll make us a nice supper. You can build a fire in the fireplace. We can hold hands and cuddle, talk, and make love — and figure out what to say tomorrow. Let's treat this as a special, crazy gift, Dick."

She drew him into her smooth arms, and he began to unwind a bit. Perhaps she was right. This was their first and only chance to feel relaxed, satisfied, and alone together. He should relish it. Tomorrow he'd find the right thing to say — he'd tell Susie he was inspecting property near the river and got trapped. That sounded good.

He took a martini from Annie's graceful hand. She drew the drapes, and he built a big fire. Then they sat on the big living room sofa, drinking and gazing in wonder at each other. It never seemed quite real when they were apart — but when they were together the special feelings between them were unmistakable.

They drew closer and embraced. They dozed in each other's arms for a while, a tender luxury they'd never been able to enjoy before.

Then Annie broiled a steak while Dick added more wood to the fire. After dinner, wine, and brandy, they chatted for a while. What a spacious and wondrous chance to be together with no clocks to hurry them.

After a while they both fell silent. They had never really shared too many common interests. They didn't really have that much to say to each other. Dick yawned. It had been a long and tiring day. Work in the morning and meeting Annie at noontime. The anxiety, tension, and frustration of being trapped. The warm fire, food, drinks, and delicious lovemaking. Dick felt very sleepy.

They agreed that they should go to bed early that night. They both wanted to be up at dawn, to get out as soon as the barriers opened. Annie led Dick into the bedroom and pulled back the covers of the queen size bed. They took off their clothes, turned off the lights, and snuggled up cosily in each other's arms.

"This is our first night together, Dick," murmured Annie. "It's our honeymoon. I love you."

Dick fell peacefully and deeply asleep in her arms. But an hour or so later he was wakened by Annie roughly shaking his shoulders.

"What's wrong, Susie?" he mumbled.

"I'm not Susie, I'm Annie," she whispered sharply. "And you were

snoring."

"Sorry love," he apologized. "I forgot where I was for a minute. Yes, Susie says I snore sometimes when I'm very tired."

"It keeps me awake," said Annie.

"The snoring?"

"Yes. I can't fall asleep in a room where somebody snores."

"I'm sorry," he said, feeling chagrined. "I didn't know that."

"And I didn't know you snored," she said, kissing his cheek gently. "It's nothing personal, Dick. You understand that, don't you? I love you — I just can't fall asleep with a man who snores."

"Should I sleep on the sofa?"

"Would you mind, darling? I need some rest. It's not you, Dick, just the snoring. We'll have breakfast together in the morning — before you leave. I knew you'd understand."

So Dick Evans spent the night of his illicit honeymoon alone, wrapped in a blanket on Annie's big living room sofa.

During the dark of the night the motorcycle gang decided to have some fun. They were bored cruising noisily up and down Cranberry Road with nowhere to go and nothing to do.

They had eaten some burgers and fries, drunk cokes and hot coffee at Tastee-Treet. They sat around the snack bar for a while, cracking loud jokes and trying to pick up the skinny teenage waitresses in their cute little pink and white uniforms. The girls finally complained to the manager, who told them to get out.

They went over to Nicky's and bought some six-packs of beer. The driver's license of the oldest, hard-faced punk showed that he was high-school age. They sat at the outdoor tables under the awning at Tastee-Treet, drinking and wise-cracking, sniggering and trying to stay dry.

Nobody liked their looks, and nobody offered them dry shelter. The local residents all tried to ignore them, so the five kids in leathers sat under the awning, drinking beer and making lots of noise.

It grew dark and cold. Nicky's closed at six and Tastee-Treet closed at seven. The small shopping center was soon deserted. There was nobody left but the little gang of punks huddled under the awning with their big, flashy motorcycles parked nearby. By eight o'clock they were pacing around restlessly. The beer was nearly gone, and they were bored. They wanted some action.

The oldest gestured at Vic's Drug and Variety Store. "Bet there's pills in there," he muttered.

The others guffawed. "Whatcha have in mind?" asked one of his tall, wiry buddies.

"I dunno," shrugged the hard-faced punk. "Maybe speed, maybe ludes, maybe even snort. Maybe all of 'em."

The gang whooped with glee.

"What about cops?" asked a chunky, dull-eyed kid. "We might get in trouble."

"No cops will get in here tonight, moron; and if that roadblock opens up we'll just get the Hell out," said the hard-faced gang leader.

"Let's go for it!" yelled the tall, wiry punk.

"What if like some locals come after us?" asked the chunky kid nervously.

"We'll teach the old farts not to mess with us."

The motorcycle gang needed some action in the dark, chilly night. They made their move. They forced open the door of Vic's Drug and Variety Store and stole some speed and a bunch of other pills. The alarm bell rang loudly, of course, but no police came. Nearby residents heard the bell, but nobody wanted to get involved.

The gang returned to the shelter of the awning and washed down the pills with the last of their beer. By nine o'clock they were feeling pretty crazy. They were cold and all hyped up — with no place to go and nothing to do.

They got on their bikes, gunned their engines and cruised up and down Cranberry Road — looking for some action.

Mrs. Sanford's elderly, dignified, black and tan terrier, Samuel, was out for his usual evening stroll. Samuel walked a little stiffly these days due to a touch of arthritis.

But his large black eyes still gleamed with the friendly enthusiasm of a pup in the glow of the streetlights. His shaggy black and tan coat protected him from the rain that dripped from the trees. It was an unusually dark and quiet night, with no sounds of radios or flickering TVs coming from the houses.

Samuel walked along the edge of Cranberry Road exploring his regular haunts and saluting his favorites with a lifted hind leg. He had just greeted Jane Borchers's sagging gatepost when he heard the growl of motorcycles racing up the road. Samuel cocked his head to one side and waved his shaggy tail slightly. He enjoyed widowed Mrs. Sanford's occasional visitors. Was company coming?

The five big motorcycles roared around the curves of Cranberry Road. When they reached Jane Borchers's house the hard-faced leader spotted the glow of an animal's eyes in the streetlights. With a wild whoop he swerved the bike so that it hit the animal and tossed it up into the air.

Samuel yelped loudly.

"Hey, why'd you do that?" yelled the chunky, dull-eyed kid from his bike.

The gang leader guffawed.

The bikes raced away and Samuel's bloody black and tan body lay

twitching by the side of the road. He tried to get up, then he whimpered and yelped for a few more minutes. Then mercifully he was still.

Old Mrs. Sanford heard the commotion and came out with her flashlight. She broke down crying when she found her only companion's mangled body in front of Jane's house. She carried the mess of blood and shaggy fur back to her home.

The punks continued to cruise up and down Cranberry Road still looking for action. They stopped to snoop around some houses. They weren't thinking burglary, since they'd left the cash register at Vic's intact. Now they were thinking about women — young ones who were all alone.

The phones began ringing up and down Cranberry Road. Vic Moran, owner of the drugstore, found out about the burglary and called some friends. People phoned their neighbors when they realized that the motorcycle gang was prowling around and had killed Mrs. Sanford's dog.

A group of neighborhood men met at Vic's little green house to decide what to do. Some of them brought guns. The men didn't talk too long. They knew what to do. They went looking for the gang.

The five flashy motorcycles were parked near Sally Beasley's house. Sally taught piano at her home, and her husband hadn't returned from work — like so many others. She was alone in their shingled cottage with a stranded music student, thirteen-year-old Cindy Lewis. Sally was a slight woman with reddish-blond hair and big hazel eyes. Cindy was plump and silly, and wore braces that must have cost her parents a mint.

The gang watched them practicing piano through the living room windows of the cottage, then forced open the front door, guffawing crazily and nervously wielding their switchblade knives.

Sally and Cindy screamed.

"You be nice to us and nobody'll get hurt," sneered the hard-faced gang leader. "It's cold and lonely out there. We need someplace warm to stay — and we need some company."

"Oh," stammered Sally. "Sit down then. I'll fix you boys some hot cocoa."

"Thank you ma'am . . ." began the chunky, dull-eyed kid.

The other four sniggered and gestured at him to shut up.

"We don't need no cocoa," said the leader, grabbing Sally's arm roughly. The two others grabbed Cindy's arms and she began to cry.

The group of neighborhood men in plaid wool jackets, windbreakers, and knit caps cruised along Cranberry Road in Vic Moran's van, with loaded guns cradled in their laps.

"There they are!" yelled Vic, spotting the five big motorcycles parked among some bushes by the side of the road. "Let's go find those damn nitwits and talk some sense into them."

Puffing a little with exertion and anxiety, the neighborhood men

checked several houses in the vicinity of the parked bikes until they finally reached Sally Beasley's house. Through the lighted windows the grim scene was plainly visible. Two of the punks had Sally pinned to the sofa and were ripping her clothes. Two others were pawing at Cindy on the floor. A chunky, dull-eyed kid in leathers stood near the piano looking very confused.

The men burst in, and Sally and Cindy screamed and sobbed for help.

"Get the Hell out of here or this woman is dead," said the hard-faced leader, holding a knife to Sally's throat. "This is our party. Nobody invited you."

The neighborhood men all raised their guns with fluid gesture that seemed unlikely for such an ungainly bunch.

"Better calm down, boys; or someone will get hurt," said Vic Moran.

"We don't want to hurt nobody," stammered the chunky kid.

"Shut up!" snapped the hard-faced gang leader. "You got us outnumbered and you got guns," he said to the men. "So we're splitting. And we're taking this little lady with us so you don't get no big-shot ideas about coming after us."

He pressed his glittering switchblade knife right up against Sally's throat and pulled her roughly off the sofa by her arm. The neighborhood men were horrified to see that her pink blouse and wool skirt were half torn off.

The gang leader gestured to his buddies and dragged Sally, struggling and crying, towards the door. Three of the punks followed him closely, brandishing their knives at her. The chunky kid trailed out the door behind them looking terribly unhappy.

The men weren't sure what to do. If they fired, they'd be risking Sally's life — and legal trouble later on. If they didn't shoot, the gang would be on the loose — with Sally as hostage.

They followed the punks out the door to the road — then they hesitated uncertainly. The gang leader sensed that he had a temporary advantage and hauled Sally roughly onto the motorcycle, gunned his engine and sped away. The gang followed.

But the chunky kid eyed the neighborhood men questioningly.

He was younger than the others and liked to go joy-riding, but he really didn't want to get in trouble.

"Calm down and stay safe," said Vic. "You don't look mean like the rest of them. Drop your knife and turn yourself in — and we'll find you someplace dry to sleep it off tonight."

The chunky kid looked frightened and confused. Perhaps it was the mixture of booze and various pills, or some dull-witted idea of macho gang loyalty. After a moment he clambered onto his bike and roared away. None of the men had the heart to raise their guns and shoot at him — he was too young and he looked stupid and drugged, but not very

mean.

During this time Dick Evans snored gently on Annie's sofa, while Jane tried to comfort Mrs. Sanford over the loss of her dog Samuel.

Most people on Cranberry Road were unaware that the punks were still on the loose. They went to bed early since there was no radio or TV to keep them amused. Some slept fitfully, full of nervous dreams. Others needed a valium or drinks to relax. Some fell into an unusually deep slumber as a welcome way to forget the frightening situation.

Dick Evans continued to snore on Annie's sofa.

The men jumped into the van and raced after the punks. They found the bikes parked near the riverside picnic area that was popular during the summer.

The men grabbed their guns and flashlights and poked nervously among the soggy bushes and trees, searching for Sally and the gang.

Vic Moran scanned the area with his flashlight. Suddenly something leaped from behind a big oak tree. He felt a wrenching thud and a sharp, burning sensation between his shoulder blades. The tall, wiry punk had his arm wrapped around Vic's neck like a steel cable, and the knife blade pressed up against his back.

"Drop your gun, call off your men, and leave us alone!" hissed the punk in Vic's ear.

Vic Moran was a plump, sedentary man. He did a little hunting with his buddies; but mostly he lived behind the counter of his pharmacy, trading gossip with the local housewives. He wasn't used to tromping around the woods at night chasing hoodlums. That was police work. He was no match for a powerful young tough. His gun fell into the mud. Now the gang had two hostages.

The chunky kid blundered among the bushes and found them struggling. He looked worried.

"Grab his gun and cover him!" snapped the wiry one, his arm holding Vic like a vise.

The chunky kid picked up the shotgun and pointed it vaguely in Vic's direction.

"Help us out, kid; and we'll make sure you don't get in trouble," pleaded Vic.

The wiry punk tightened his arm like a python and dragged Vic to a secluded picnic area, where the other three had Sally pinned to a wet wooden table, struggling and sobbing.

The chunky kid followed, pointing Vic's big shotgun uncertainly.

Just then the neighborhood men came through the bushes with their guns and flashlights. They spotted the grim tableau.

"Looks like that dumb kid's gonna shoot Vic!" one man whispered in a

shocked tone. "Better get the stupid bastard first."

Lester Picton was an experienced hunter who had won some prizes for marksmanship. He studied the situation carefully with his flashlight. Then he reluctantly raised his gun and fired once. There was a sharp cracking sound and the chunky kid crumpled into the mud with a surprised expression on his face. The shotgun rolled into the bushes.

The wiry punk was startled and loosened his grip for just a moment. In that moment Vic wrenched free and leaped away from his captor, whose reflexes had been slowed by the booze and drugs.

The tall, wiry young punk stood alone among the trees in the glare of the men's flashlights. There was another sharp crack and the wiry punk twisted half way around and crashed into the mud.

Now there were three crazed kids left — holding Sally at knifepoint.

The hard-faced one dragged her to a sitting position, using her body as a shield, and pressed the glittering switchblade against her throat.

"I think I can get 'em," Lester whispered. "If I aim real careful. Their heads are up high and Sally is lower down on the table. They're rabid animals — but I don't want no trouble later."

"We'll back you, Lester," the men murmured. "They were coming at you — it was self-defense."

Lester was sweating with tension in the cold night air. The men held up flashlights and he raised his gun, took careful aim — and a shot cracked through the night.

The body of the hard-faced punk jerked convulsively — then he collapsed into Sally's lap. The other two ducked and ran toward the trees. There were two more shots as Lester picked them off one by one.

Sally screamed shrilly. The men ran out of the bushes towards her. She was okay; she hadn't been hit.

Lester took his flashlight and examined his handiwork with shaking hands. The skulls of the motorcycle punks were bloody with bullet wounds that had accurately found their marks. Lester should have won another marksmanship prize tonight — but he didn't feel like celebrating.

He felt like being sick.

The springtime drizzle continued throughout the night. Jane Borchers slept fitfully and woke up just before dawn. Many people on Cranberry Road got up around the same time. She and the kids downed a quick breakfast of corn flakes, coffee, and milk, then squished through the mud to the Ford. They drove to both intersections where large crowds had already collected, and were dismayed to find the barriers still there, red lights blinking forlornly in the morning mist.

"Let's climb over the ridge or wade across the river," cried Ben. "This is creepy, I want to get out of here! It's a school day, and I have a spelling test."

"Yeah, let's try the ridge," said Jenny. "We can wear our hiking boots and raincoats."

Jane drove home silently and they all changed into their sturdiest clothes. Then they began to climb up the ridge behind their house. The main part of town lay just on the other side of the ridge, and they sometimes made the climb for fun in the summer.

But this wasn't summer; and the ground was slippery, with precarious footholds. Jane and Ben slipped several times, and Jenny was bruised by a nasty tumble, sliding down several yards of loose and rocky debris. They were all wet and muddy by the time they reached the top of the ridge. They ran to the freedom of the crest with a surge of excitement — which vanished when they encountered the same gentle but unyielding pressure barrier that blocked both intersections.

"What is this stuff?" whined Ben with a red, tearful face, punching with his fists and kicking angrily at the spongy surface that blocked their way. They could *see* over the ridge, but they couldn't go any farther. The ridge was blocked too.

So was the river. A few hardy people tried to get out that way. Wearing hip boots, they waded into the icy, rushing water. They reached the center of the river bed, the swift current up to their chests almost knocking them down. But they could go no farther. The clear but unforgiving barrier ran right down the center of the river. They could see the other bank, but they couldn't reach it.

They could also see the dead bodies of the punks under the trees, but nobody said anything. They all knew what had happened and they chose to ignore it.

Apparently there really was no way to leave Cranberry Road.

Just before dawn Dick Evans woke up. He crawled back into Annie's warm bed and they made love briefly, one more time. Then they got up and quietly had some coffee and toast. Dick was a little surprised at how drawn and tired Annie's face looked in the morning. She told him to use John's razor to shave the scratchy stubble off his face.

He put on his three-piece suit again. "We'll tell people that I came here to inspect some riverside property," he said. "I got trapped by the roadblock and remembered that John lived nearby. You were glad to see me because you were frightened. I helped you calm down and spent the night here on the sofa — which is true. Nobody ever has to know that we've been seeing each other all along."

"Right," she smiled.

He kissed her cheek and went out the back door.

He was appalled when he reached the intersection, saw the crowd, and realized that the barrier was still there. He began to swear and pound the dashboard of the Toyota with his fist. He sat at the edge of the crowd, his

face red with anger and frustration, cursing under his breath and wondering what to do. He wanted to get *out* of this wretched place!

The crowd began to thin. People grew tired of hanging around in the chilly morning drizzle waiting for something to happen. They might as well wait for news at home where it was warm.

Home. Dick Evans wanted to go *home*!

There wasn't much of a crowd now, and Dick pulled closer to the intersection. Just in front of the ugly blinking red light, the new arrow signs that pointed back towards Cranberry Road, and the big yellow and black sign that said: **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.**

The Toyota met the barrier at about 35 MPH. Dick felt a shuddering wave of pressure, then heard a loud, wrenching groan from his own mouth and from the car.

As if in slow motion he saw the entire front of the Toyota crumple like a wad of paper, and felt the unequal jolt of soft flesh striking hard metal. His head whipped forward and the steering wheel hit his forehead just above the eyes.

The crumpled Toyota swerved half around and Dick's face and shoulder slammed painfully against the door. Then he blacked out and the slow-motion movie — and the groaning — ceased.

During the morning everybody felt very excited and charged with adrenalin. They all checked their emergency supplies and bought out much of the stock of Nicky's Market and Vic's damaged drug and variety store. People wanted candles, and firewood in case the power went, so a bunch of men went out with chain saws to cut trees along the river. They avoided the trees that sheltered the bodies of the dead punks.

People speculated and exchanged their sparse supply of news, theories, and gossip. Was it a message from God or a Russian plot? Groups went up along the ridge and down the length of the river, and checked the intersection again and again. Neighbors phoned each other to make sure everything was okay.

Dick Evans came to; and there was no apparent concussion or broken bones, though the Toyota was totaled by his desperate attempt to smash through the barricade. His face and forehead were swollen and badly bruised, and his shoulder was sprained. Vic the druggist was called on to give first aid. He bandaged the cuts on Dick's face and put an Ace bandage around his shoulder.

"You don't live around here, do you?" asked Vic.

"No, I just happened to be in the neighborhood and got trapped," said Dick, his speech slurred by a very swollen cheek. "My friends John and Annie live nearby, so I took shelter there. My wife must be frantic with worry. That's why I tried to smash through. At least you folks all live around here."

"We're pretty worried too. What do you want to do now?" asked Vic.

"I guess Annie will let me stay on her sofa until this crazy thing is over," shrugged Dick. The shrug made him wince with pain.

There were some raised eyebrows at the thought of Annie alone in her house with a strange man, but mostly people tried to be sensible and avoid malicious gossip. It was entirely reasonable that a polite and decent stranger got trapped inside the barrier and needed to stay at his friend's house. It wasn't the poor man's fault that Annie's husband wasn't home. Besides, he didn't seem in any shape to do much harm.

Annie began to cry when Dick was brought to her door (her *front* door) covered with bandages. But she calmed down quickly and told the druggist not to worry. She'd look after her husband's poor colleague, see that he got his pain pills, some warm food, and a place to lie down.

Dick stumbled sheepishly to the sofa and fell into a deep, shocked sleep. The kind of sleep that makes people snore and snort loudly.

By afternoon the excitement had died down. The adrenalin subsided and the drizzle — and the barricade — continued. People grew bored, irritable, and restless. They stopped trekking to the ridges or the river, and even stopped checking the intersections so frequently.

There was nothing to do and no place to go. A feeling of drab, helpless, hopeless claustrophobia closed in on the residents of Cranberry Road. People sat quietly in their homes, fretting about missed appointments and jobs, school and family, but mostly surrounded by their own dark and depressing thoughts.

In the afternoon Dick woke up and Annie made him some canned tomato soup. His mouth was too sore to eat any solid food, and he was still too shaken up. They sat quietly in the living room, unable to think of much to say, watching the dreary drizzle outside.

"This reminds me of a movie I once saw," said Annie. "*The Man Who Came to Dinner*. This demanding and crotchety old rich guy visits a nice family, slips and breaks his leg and must stay for months — and the family has to take care of him."

"I'm not a demanding and crotchety old guy, and I'm sorry you must bother taking care of me," slurred Dick.

"I didn't mean it like that," said Annie. "Don't take things so personally."

They sat silently for a while.

"This reminds me of another story," she finally said. "*No Exit* by Sartre, the French philosopher. All these polite and elegant Europeans are trapped in a room and they can't get out. They're just stuck there together — forever. Then they realize that they are in Hell. Being stuck there together is Hell."

"Amen, brother," slurred Dick.

"So you think that being stuck here with me is Hell?" she snapped.

"Don't take things so personally," slurred Dick.

After the first week went by and every effort to escape the barrier had failed, the people of Cranberry Road felt terribly discouraged. At first they had worried about missed jobs and schools, meetings and appointments, friends and relatives. They tried every way to elude the barricade but nothing worked. They were trapped.

People felt irritable and pretty crazy. How should they cope with something like this? Tempers flared and fighting and quarreling could be heard behind the draw-drapes of the ranch-style houses and bungalows up and down the road.

Renee Sanderson's husband beat her up pretty badly, and one side of her face was swollen and bruised. He packed some things and moved up the road with Ralph Richards, whose wife had gone into town for a dental appointment — and never returned. Soon the two men began drinking and fighting, and Renee's husband begged her to take him back in. She talked it over with her friends and they all agreed that the bizarre situation had driven him stir crazy. So she let him back into the house — but soon you could hear them fighting and yelling again.

People gathered at the small shopping center as the only community meeting place on the road. Nobody bothered to dress up much anymore. Why bother? The women lost interest in make-up, clothes, and hair styling; and many men carelessly let the stubble grow on their faces. They all wandered aimlessly to the shopping center and the barriers at least once daily, wearing old jeans and sweaters — to see if there was any news. There was never any news.

Nobody drove their cars anymore because gas was running low, so the deserted road and parking lot felt eerie and silent. The water and power were still functioning, but how long would that last? Garbage was starting to accumulate and stink, so people dumped it along the river. But you could still see and smell it.

The people wandered up and down Cranberry Road like lost and forlorn ghosts, shabbily dressed in sloppy clothes with worried and tense expressions on their faces. They wandered to the shopping center and the barricades, to their neighbors' houses, and then home — where they tried to read or sat and drank — then grew restless and set out to wander again.

Nicky's market was out of perishables like milk and meat, produce and bread. Cheese and eggs were running very low, and so were some items like booze, animal food, and toilet paper. There was still a wide variety of canned and frozen goods on the shelves, so nobody was going hungry — yet.

The drugstore still had a good stock of insulin and other vital medications for those who needed them, but Vic was unwilling to give out valium or sleeping pills to people who felt anxious. Nicky's agreed to give credit

to those who had run out of cash, or didn't already have check privileges at the store. This wasn't usual policy — but it was an emergency.

"I tell you it's God's will," said Mrs. McCauley in Nicky's empty parking lot one drizzly afternoon. Her grey hair was starting to show at the roots now that she couldn't get to the beauty parlor in town to have it tinted black. "God knows there's been plenty of sinning along this road — even if folks don't know the sordid details. God sent this wall of Jericho to us as a test. When we're ready to clean up our hearts and minds and let God enter our souls, then the walls will come tumbling down."

"Baloney," snapped Harry Rawson, tall and leathery, chewing nervously on his pipe. "It must be some kind of Russian weapon — or maybe something let loose by our own government. And we don't know what's coming next. Maybe radiation, maybe germs. Maybe one of them bombs that destroys the people but not the buildings. Pretty soon we'll all start to sicken and die — if we don't go crazy or starve first. And God isn't paying any attention to us — just like usual."

"We don't know what it is," said Marge Cambell the fourth-grade teacher, still looking trim and pretty even in a faded sweat shirt and jeans. "And we don't know how long it will last — or what we'll find on the outside when it finally goes away. The important thing is to organize the neighborhood efficiently so we can deal with the crisis without panic. We should ration the food that's left at Nicky's; organize neighborhood patrols, first-aid stations, and therapy groups so everybody stays safe and sane. We should set up a little school for the kids and start planting vegetable gardens. There's packets of seed in the drugstore and Mrs. Simmons has two pairs of breeder rabbits. Spring is here; we could have fresh vegetables and meat in a few weeks if we start right now."

Everyone eyed Marge Cambell listlessly. Nobody wanted to start anything right now.

Only tall, blond Ralph Richards, whose wife had gone to the dentist and never returned, eyed Marge and her compact body with interest. "Those are sound ideas," drawled Ralph, pinning Marge with his blue eyes. "We should get together and discuss it."

Marge, whose husband had never come home from work, looked at Ralph with surprise. Then she flushed and smiled slightly. "Yes, let's get together soon," she said.

"Sinning," snorted Mrs. McCauley.

"I'm walking down to the barricade to see if there's anything new," grumbled Harry Rawson.

"But you've already been there twice today," snapped his wife, a round muffin of a woman whose red and bleary eyes reflected an alcoholic haze.

"You got any better ideas?" growled Harry. "I'm going bananas cooped up like this!"

"At least I don't babble about weird bombs that destroy people and not

buildings," she said.

"You're too busy hitting the bourbon bottle to read about them things in the newspaper."

"Shove it, Harry."

"I'll shove you, bitch! I gotta get out of here. I'm slipping over the edge!" Harry Rawson stalked away from the group.

"I haven't seen a newspaper in days," said Jane Borchers wistfully, her uncurled hair hanging limply around her tense face. "I wonder what's going on — outside."

"First you must let God *inside*," said Mrs. McCauley.

"I don't care if I ever see the outside again," declared big Stan Daniels who was laid off from the factory a few months ago. "What's so great out there, anyway? Just poverty and vicious crime, folks out of work and no jobs, terrible wars and inflation, taxes and lying politicians. We've got it good in here. We're safe and comfortable, and like Marge said we can raise our own meat and vegetables. There's plenty of firewood down by the river."

"Plenty of garbage down by the river now too," said Jane. "And most of us have people outside that we're terribly worried about."

"To Hell with them," grumbled Stan. "I hope the barrier stays. I never want to face the dog-eat-dog outside world again."

"Shut your mouth or I'll shut it for you," Dick Evans snarled abruptly. His face and shoulder were still bandaged, but he was recovering from his auto smash-up and was out for a walk — alone. "A loser like you might be happy in a cage, but most of us have important things to do outside — and people we love." Dick seemed almost on the verge of tears.

"You're a stranger here," growled Stan. "So you'd better act polite. I got plenty of friends on this road who wouldn't like hearing me called a loser. Just because I got laid off at the plant doesn't mean I'm no loser, and I'm ready to prove it. I'll leave you alone because you're still healing from your dumb accident, but you better watch your mouth from now on."

People began to murmur and comment as the tensions in the little group in the drizzly parking lot grew. A few people thought Stan was right; it was a relief to be free of the outside world. But they were the minority. Most sided with Dick — they wanted to be free at any cost. Yet Stan was right about one thing: a stranger in the neighborhood shouldn't bad-mouth a long-time resident who was down on his luck.

The sense of tangible irritation increased until it was almost a living, crazed thing. The frustrated mob mind wanted to fight it out and somehow end this horrible thing once and for all.

"Calm down, everybody," said Marge Cambell in her firm playground voice. "This squabbling won't help anybody. The important thing is to cooperate."

The quarreling quieted down, but everyone (except Ralph Richards) eyed Marge as if she were a schoolmarm spoilsport.

That night the drizzle turned into a heavy rain, and Jane Borchers slept poorly. It had been drizzling or raining almost constantly since the roadblock started. The river was full of rushing water, the ground was soggy and muddy, and if it didn't stop soon some basements and garages would flood. Were these just coincidental heavy spring rains, or was this part of the — effect?

Jane lay awake much of the night listening to the rain, missing her husband Tom, and feeling lonely, bored and depressed. How much longer could this thing last? How long before they started to run out of food and people really flipped out?

It was obvious that nearly everyone on the road was getting dangerously close to the edge. There had to be a way out, there *had* to. But there was no way out. That's what was driving everyone mad — and closer to violent rage. Jane wept a little, which helped release some tension for a short time.

She and the kids were up before dawn. The rain had subsided to a drizzle again. They listlessly spooned oatmeal topped with raisins and powdered milk, which were the only fruit and dairy products left at Nicky's.

"I hate powdered milk," whined Ben.

"You need the calcium so your bones can grow," said Jane absently.

"Why bother?" grumbled Jenny. "There's no reason to grow any more."

"Shut up!" yelled Ben, wanting to complain but not to hear complaints from others. "Let's go down to the intersection and see if the storm washed the barrier away."

"Don't be stupid," said Jenny. "It's hardly light, and the rain never washes that spooky thing away."

"Well, I'm going anyway," said Ben, pushing away his half-eaten bowl of oatmeal, and pulling on his muddy rainboots and yellow rainslicker with the faded Peanuts cartoon on the back.

"Wait up, I'll come too," called Jenny, finishing her oatmeal and pulling on her own muddy boots and jacket.

"Go on, I'll walk over a little later," said Jane.

The two children in rubber boots and yellow raincoats scurried up the deserted road in the grey dawn light, stopping to splash in puddles and muddy their jeans — which their mother hated.

They reached the deserted Ranbo Parkway intersection and weren't surprised that everything still looked the same. There was the big, ugly blinking red stoplight, the mud-spattered arrow sign pointing back towards Cranberry Road, and the large yellow and black traffic sign

saying: **Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.**

They could look into Ranbo Parkway, but they knew it wasn't real — because there was never any traffic or people.

"Hey look!" said Jenny. "That **Do Not Exit** sign is tilting a little in the mud. I wonder if it will fall over?"

"Maybe we could *push* it over," grinned Ben mischievously. "I hate that sign."

"Me too."

Ben aimed a fierce soccer kick at the metal sign pole, which tilted just a little further in the gooey mud supporting its base.

"Looks like it's gonna fall soon. Should we knock it down?"

"Yeah," smirked Jenny. "I hate it."

Both kids grabbed tightly onto the cold metal sign pole. With slippery effort they wrenched and wrestled the entire sign down to the ground.

Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic was pushed face down in the slimy mud.

The kids jumped up and down and cheered.

"Serves the nasty thing right," said Jenny. "What about the arrow sign? Can we get it down too?"

"We might get in trouble," said Ben dubiously.

"We're *already* in trouble, dummy!" said Jenny. "Haven't you noticed? It's all because of those hateful signs."

Jenny walked to the arrow sign that pointed in towards Cranberry Road and shook it. But this signpole was on slightly higher ground, and still firmly rooted in the soil. Jenny tugged and pulled, but the arrow sign wouldn't budge.

"Why don't we twist the stupid thing around?" asked Ben with a wicked glint in his grey eyes.

"How do you mean?"

"I could climb up the pole and turn the arrow sign so it's pointing in the *other* direction."

"You mean pointing out towards Ranbo Parkway?" asked Jenny disdainfully. "What good would that do?"

"I don't know," shrugged Ben. "It's just for fun. I'm sick of looking at that yucky arrow sign."

"Go ahead," said Jenny. "But if you get in trouble, don't blame me."

Ben shinnied up the sign pole and found that the arrow sign was attached by two large screws. He fished his indispensable scouting knife out of his jeans pocket and opened up the screwdriver attachment. The screws were rusty and tight, but after a while he managed to loosen them just a little — just enough to twist the sign around so that the arrow pointed towards Ranbo Parkway — instead of back up Cranberry Road.

"Serves the crummy thing right," grinned Ben.

Suddenly the kids heard an odd burst of sound coming from the

intersection. They looked around. The monotonous red light was still blinking on and off, but when the light flickered off they could catch a quick blast of traffic sounds and human activity from Ranbo Parkway.

Jenny and Ben watched with growing surprise. The red light flicked on and Ranbo Parkway was dead and silent. The red light flicked off and Ranbo Parkway came alive with a quick burst of sound and action.

Red light flickered on: silence.

Red light flickered off: traffic noises.

Red light on: silence.

Red light off: traffic sounds.

"What's going on?" demanded Jane, trudging up the road with a torn windbreaker and lank, unwashed hair to get some fresh air and see what the kids were doing. "What happened to the signs?"

"They must have fallen and twisted in the storm," lied Ben and Jenny simultaneously, still worried about getting into trouble. "But look! When the red light flicks off you can hear cars and people on Ranbo Parkway — and see them too, for just a second!"

"Don't make up lies," snapped Jane.

"It's *true*, mom; look!" cried Jenny.

Jane looked, and it was true. When the red light flicked off she could detect a brief spurt of noise from the intersection.

"I wonder if we could slip out when the light is off?" asked Jenny.

"Hey that's a good idea!" cried Ben, hopping around excitedly. "You don't have many good ideas, Jenny."

"Calm down," barked Jane. She studied the intersection for a while. It was true.

Red light on: silence.

Red light off: shadowy people and traffic noises.

"I suppose we could try," she shrugged. "If we stand right up against the barrier we can see if it gives a little when the light is off — and we could try to leap across."

"But what if we — get caught in the middle?" asked Jenny.

"We're already caught, dummy," said Ben. "I'm going to check it out." Ben ran up to the intersection, to the place where the gentle pressure began. The light flicked on, then the light flicked off — and Ben took a flying leap and was gone.

"He did it, Mom!" screamed Jenny. "He jumped through."

"Ben?" called Jane, looking worried. "Where are you, Ben?"

"He's outside," laughed Jenny. "Come on, let's go."

"But maybe he's caught — in the middle," said Jane dubiously. "We should tell everybody else — and get some things."

"We'd see him when the light went off if he were caught," said Jenny patiently. "There may not be time to tell people or get our things. If we wait the barrier might grow solid again. I bet they'll figure it out too,

when they all show up later."

"You're probably right," said Jane. "Come on, let's give it a try."

Mother and daughter approached the intersection apprehensively. The red light flicked on and they felt the unyielding barrier. The red light flicked off and they heard traffic and felt — nothing.

The red light flickered on and they felt the barrier. The red light flickered off — and they both leaped as far as they could into Ranbo Parkway.

There was Ben waiting for them with a huge gap-toothed grin on his face. There were cars and buses and early morning commuter traffic. There was bright morning sunshine instead of drizzly clouds. There was a small jabbering crew of chilled and very excited policemen, reporters, and relatives keeping up a vigil at the mysterious Cranberry Road pressure zone.

"Are you from *inside* Cranberry Road, ma'am?" asked a surprised and tired looking young reporter with a camera and small microphone.

"Yes," said Jane, beginning to tremble as a feeling of shocked relief washed over her.

"Did you just escape?"

"Yes," said Jane, feeling like crying, and still unable to collect her thoughts.

"The scientists theorized that it's some kind of intense localized weather front between the river and the ridge, like a small cyclone. What's it like — inside, and how did you get out?" asked the astonished reporter.

"Some of the road signs fell down," burred Ben. "And that opened up holes in the barricade — but only when the red light is off."

"I see," said the reporter slowly, looking extremely confused. "Will the others be out soon too?"

"I don't know," said Jane. "There was nobody around when we noticed the gaps in the roadblock, and we didn't want to wait in case it sealed up again."

"I'm Susie Evans, is my husband in there?" demanded a pretty blonde woman tearfully. "I think he may be trapped inside."

"You mean Dick Evans?" asked Jane slowly. "Yes, he's in there. He said he was inspecting some river property when the barrier went up. He got a little hurt trying to escape, but he's getting better now. Annie took him in, he's staying with her."

"Oh," said Susie Evans, looking pale.

A Red Cross volunteer gave Jane and the kids hot coffee with fresh milk and donuts — and assured them that disaster aid would be available to help them get resettled if they lost all their possessions and home. Tom Borchers was notified at his sister's nearby house, where he'd been staying since this started.

The small group of policemen, reporters, and relatives hurried to



phone others. Soon the vigil at the weird Cranberry Road phenomenon grew to an excited, noisy mob. They all waited tensely for the others who were trapped inside to notice the gaps and jump through.

"Don't worry, they'll figure it out pretty soon," grinned Ben, his grey eyes sparkling as he hugged his Dad. "They'll all check the barrier later in the morning, and they'll notice that the signs are down and you can hear traffic noises from the intersection when the red light is off. Maybe they'll *smash* the red light and open up the road completely — so we can go home again. I bet they'll all figure it out and come through pretty soon."

Over in the next county, George Hanson got into his old Chevy and started for work along Bains Ridge Lane. It was a grey, drizzly morning, and he carried his sack lunch and wool plaid windbreaker with him.

He backed out of his driveway and flicked on the car radio to catch the morning traffic reports. There was nothing but loud static.

"That's weird," he muttered.

When he reached the highway intersection at the end of the ridge he found something even weirder. There was a large, blinking, red stop light, and big, fresh yellow-and-black-arrow signs pointing back towards Bains Ridge, and a large new traffic sign saying:

Do Not Exit. One Way Traffic.

"Damn," grumbled George. "Why don't they put up notices if they're

doing road work at the highway? Now I'll be late for work. I got to turn around and drive all the way back to the other end of the ridge. . . ."

Upstate, Mrs. Belinsky pulled on a cosy hand-knitted sweater and went out in the grey drizzle with her small white poodle, de Gaulle.

They climbed into her little VW and turned on the radio to a favorite talk show while the engine carefully warmed. They were going to visit her sister who lived just beyond the intersection at Lake Shore Drive.

But there was nothing on the radio except noisy static.

"That's strange," said Mrs. Belinsky, as she pulled the VW away from her small frame house.

De Gaulle whimpered softly in agreement.



Grania Davis has lived everywhere from the mountains of Mexico to the jungles of Central America, from Tibetan villages in the Indian Himalayas to Tokyo. Her travels are often reflected in her writing, including her most recent fantasy novel, The Rainbow Annals, which is based on Tibetan legends. Many of her early stories were published in Fantastic. In addition to writing, she also works as a travel agent (surprise!). She has a son who plays soccer and a tiny cabin on a ridge along a river — that resembles Cranberry Road.

MOVING?

If you're a subscriber to *Amazing*® Science Fiction Stories and you're planning to move, remember that you have to tell us your new address in advance to guarantee uninterrupted delivery of your subscription. Give us at least 4 weeks' notice (6 weeks is even better), and inform us both of your old and your new addresses with a simple note or postcard, or by filling out and sending us one of the change-of-address cards available at your post office.

Send your change-of-address notification to *Amazing*® Science Fiction Stories, Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

The Observatory

by George H. Scithers

Normally, a TV series has no more than three months or so from approval of the series by the network until the first episode is broadcast — which explains a lot of the problems that beset most new series. “AMAZING” Stories,” the NBC/Universal/Steven Spielberg series that rented the use of this magazine’s name, has *thirteen* months. Inevitably, a little of that time was spent just getting used to the idea of *having* enough time to do things *right*; but now real work is well under way. Several original scripts are in preparation. A project manager for the TV series has been appointed. And a fair amount of research has been accomplished, using the science-fiction and fantasy library of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society — research that is not limited to material which was published in *Amazing® Science Fiction Stories*.

While we have published a goodly number of stories since April of 1926, the whole corpus of magazine science fiction and fantasy far exceeds what is in the pages of our 521 (so far) issues; Mr. Spielberg, quite wisely, isn’t limiting his TV series to what’s been published in *Amazing®*. Some newspaper accounts have given the impression that Universal City Studios bought TV rights to everything we’ve ever published. **This is not so!** All we’ve done is to lease to Universal the use of our name, and to offer to help Universal to find authors of whatever published stories that the studio may want to negotiate about.

The science-fiction magazines operate very differently than do the movie/TV studios. Over the past 59 years,

the editors of this magazine have looked at almost anything at all readable that reaches our mail box. We — and the other editors of SF magazines — have a long tradition of helping beginning writers to become professionals; in effect, we’re operating a writing school.

The policy of Universal City Studios is virtually identical to that of other movie/TV studios: they do **not** read anything that even looks like a manuscript unless it has been submitted through an authorized literary agent — that is, through an agent known and trusted by the studio. Simply put, the movie/TV studios are **not** running writing schools; instead, they depend on the established literary agents to do the initial screening of screen plays for them. (How does one get a movie/TV literary agent? If you don’t know, then — to be blunt — you probably don’t know enough about screenwriting to write an acceptable script. There are books on the subject; there are magazines such as *Writer’s Digest* or *The Writer*; there is the Writer’s Guild of America — consult them, not us.)

While we will continue to read for the magazine as always, we are **not** in any way acting as an agent for Universal Studios or for any producer associated with them. We do not forward any unpublished literary material, whether solicited or unsolicited, to Universal or to any producer associated with Universal; in fact, we won’t even discuss the content of any unpublished material that we may see with Universal City Studios or its associated producers. This policy is necessary for both business and legal reasons.



PIERS ANTHONY DOUBLE EXPOSURE

YOURS FREE WITH MEMBERSHIP DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Giant 790-page 3-in-1
volume brings you
Split Infinity, *Blue Adept*,
and *Juxtaposition*.

\$34.40
in Combined
Publishers'
Editions!



0719 Spec ed



1263 Pub ed \$15.95



1347 Spec ed



1021 Pub ed \$16.95



1206 Pub ed \$14.95



1220 Spec ed



1305 Pub ed \$16.95



1073 Pub ed \$11.95



0786 The Guardians
of Time, Time
Patrolmen, Spec.ed



1354 Storm Season,
The Face of Chaos;
Wings of Omen.
Spec.ed



0752 Elric of
Melniboné, The
Savior on the Seas of
Fate; The Weird of the
White Wolf, Spec.ed



1172 The Vanishing
Tower, The Bane of
the Black Sword;
Stormbringer.
Spec.ed

And take 4 more for \$1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS

How the Club works:

You'll receive your choice of any 4 books for only \$1 (plus shipping and handling) and a free copy of *Double Exposure* after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing. The FREE book will be yours to keep whether or not you remain a member.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections each month is only \$4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—up to 65% off. The Club offers more than 300 books to choose from. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

Note: Prices shown are publishers' edition prices.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Dept. RR-491, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

I want the best SF in or out of this world! Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated in the boxes below plus my FREE book and bill me just \$1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular Club prices in the coming year and may resign any time thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. SFBC offers serious works for mature readers.

FREE BOOK #5637	1.	2.	3.	4.
--------------------	----	----	----	----

Mr. _____
Ms. _____
(Please print)

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

If under 18, parent must sign. _____

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hard-bound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada. 88-S265F



\$34.40
in Combined
Publishers'
Editions!

WITH MEMBERSHIP

Giant 790-page 3-in-1 volume
brings you *Split Infinity*,
Blue Adept, and *Juxtaposition*.



1189 Pub ed \$14.95



0166 Pub ed \$15.95



*1164 Spec ed



*1149 Comb pub.
ed \$33.90



1099 Pub ed \$15.95



1362 Pub ed \$14.95



1271 Pub ed \$14.95



0936 Pub ed \$14.95



1131 Spec ed



†1289 Spec ed



7326 Pub ed \$15.95



1339 Pub ed \$15.95



9975 All 5 Amber
novels. 2 vols.
Comb pub.ed
\$32.30



0992 Dragonsong;
Dragonsinger;
Dragondrums.
Comb pub ed \$38.95



0943 Another Fine
Myth: Myth Concep-
tions; Myth Direc-
tions; Hit or Myth.
Spec ed



0530 Thieves' World:
Tales from the Vulgar
Unicorn; Shadows of
Sanctuary. Spec ed



1248 A Matter for
Men; A Day for
Damnation. Comb
pub ed \$33.90



6221 Foundation;
Foundation and
Empire; Second
Foundation.
Pub ed \$17.95

AND TAKE 4 MORE FOR \$1 WITH MEMBERSHIP

See other side for coupon and additional Selections.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

This Scan
is Courtesy
of the
dtsq0318 Collection